



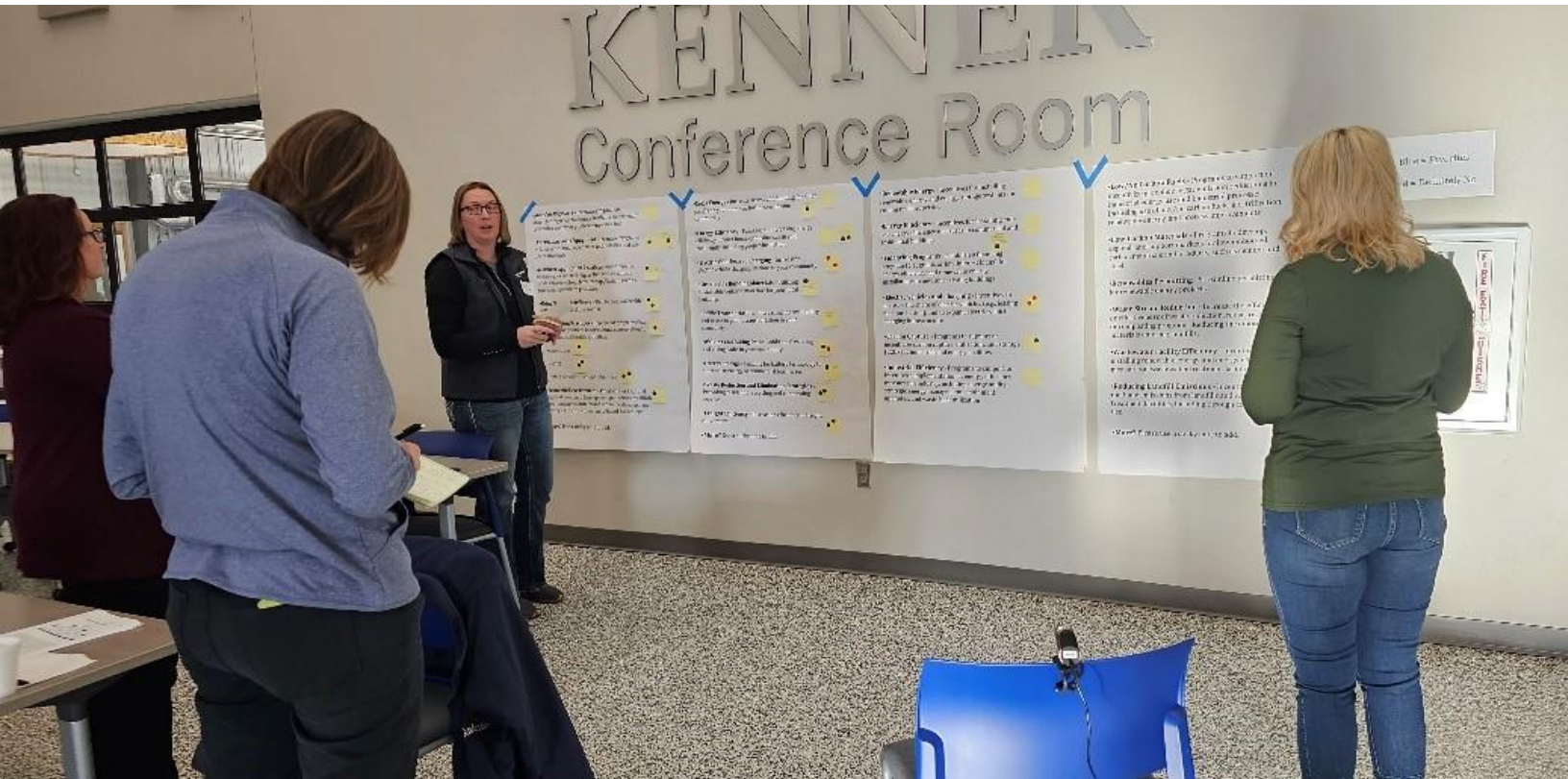
# Sustainability Input Forums

Input received in Devils Lake, ND

PREPARED FOR



DATE  
December 2023



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North Dakotans of all backgrounds were invited to come together to share innovative ideas, knowledge, and perceptions related to reducing greenhouse gas emissions during the state's Sustainability Input Forums held from October 31 through November 8, 2023, in eight locations around the state. In addition, more than 100 people shared their thoughts via an online survey through December 5.

Input received through this process will assist North Dakota in forming the basis for sustainability planning and actions in 2024 and for years to come. Information gathered will be used to inform the state's participation in U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) program. North Dakota's Sustainability Input Forums are supported with a CPRG planning grant.

This report summarizes input received through conversations held in-person and online during three sessions in Devils Lake on November 8 at Hofstad Ag Center. Subsequent input received from participants in this region through the online comment form also is included and indicated by italicized type.

## CONTEXT

The North Dakota Sustainability Input Forums were open public meetings that were organized by the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality (NDDEQ) to be conversational and informal. The role of the NDDEQ was to host and to listen, with the assistance of an independent facilitator.

Goals for the forums were two-fold: 1) hear what North Dakotans are thinking and doing related to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and 2) fuel conversation and connection between diverse stakeholders. To this end, conversations were held in a circle and lightly facilitated around a handful of core questions, as outlined in the following sections. Each session generated at least two hours of interaction in the form of verbal feedback, comment cards, and online polls and chats.

Hosts for the forums were Ann Fritz, NDDEQ, presenter; Nancy Miller, ERM, facilitator; Monica Zattera, ERM, online facilitator.

Attendees included various individuals from across industries/interests, including but not limited to, family farmers, agricultural industry professionals, ranchers, educators, and local residents. A total of 12 Devils Lake area people provided input.



## 1. CONVERSATION SUMMARIES

The conversation was educational and well received by attendees. Participants said they were pleasantly surprised by the collaboration and informal, conversational nature as opposed to a traditional public hearing session. Concerns focused primarily on the efforts and impact of current farming/ranching practices and environment and agricultural education in rural areas.

Further details of key discussion topics follow. Online comments from the Devils Lake area, but submitted subsequent to the meeting dates, have been noted in italicized type. Please note that the bullets contain verbatim comments from Comment Cards, although similar points may be combined if mentioned more than once.

### 1.1 BENEFITS

**Question:** What BENEFITS do you see for North Dakotans as greenhouse gas emissions are reduced?

Overall, participants agree on the potentially positive impact greenhouse gas reductions will have on North Dakotans, from improving the environment to making energy more efficient to aiding in reducing the frequency/impact of climate disasters. Participants in this meeting voiced a general understanding that change can be good if done correctly and that there are areas upon which to improve.

**Comments:**

- Cleaner environment = air, food, and water quality improvements
- Improved energy efficiency
- Potential to address climate change
- Potential to reduce climate disasters
- *A livable, Sustainable future for all*
- *Better quality of life*
- *Keep weather from getting warmer*

### 1.2 DOWNSIDES

**Question:** What DOWNSIDES do you see for North Dakotans as greenhouse gas emissions are reduced?

Participants voiced significant concerns for the potential personal cost to farmers/ranchers and residents when working to transition to alternative practices in rural areas. Much of this discussion was focused on the longevity of alternative solutions. There was frequent mention of carbon sequestration/storage, the potential deterioration of the infrastructure, and concerns for how it would be regulated and studied. Concerns for its potential impact on soil if a leak were to occur were mentioned repeatedly as soil would be left sterile and irreplaceable, which in turn destroys crop yields and livelihoods. Additionally, there was mention of an overall resistance to change from the general masses due to the need to shift away from traditional/generational practices.

**Comments:**

- Additional cost to economy
- How long could it take to transition?

- Is it sustainable?
- What are the unintended consequences?
- *Potential waste of resources*
- *May not be as impactful as we hope*
- *Less power or electricity*
- *Limited public knowledge*

### 1.3 EXISTING EFFORTS

**Question:** What ALREADY is being done in North Dakota to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? Who is doing it?

Current programs available to agriculture/livestock producers were discussed, however participants agreed there is a long way to go with developing these programs as they are not designed by farmers/ranchers with their needs or timelines in mind. These programs are seen as too rigorous with unrealistic expectations that are not considerate to the natural uncertainty that comes with producing in the state. Current agricultural practices designed to preserve the environment were also mentioned with specific mention of no-tillage, cover crops and use of manure as fertilizer.

**Comments:**

- Midkota Power plants trees and checks that they are growing
- Local recycling programs
- Equipment programs: FSA/NRCS, CRP-CSP
- Progressive farming techniques like reduced tillage
- Carbon capture in Bakken
- *The state government is discussing ways to reduce emissions*

### 1.4 POTENTIAL STATE INCENTIVES/SUPPORT

**Question:** In what ways would you want to see the state INCENTIVIZE, SUPPORT or just generally HELP with greenhouse gas reductions?

Attendees spent a substantial portion of time asking for the reformation of existing programs to be more understanding/inclusive to farmers and ranchers. A suggested modification was for the chemical recycling program to be restructured with more accessible time periods to better aid in the proper disposal of containers. Participants also asked for recycling programs to include materials such as iron, as a common practice currently is to leave discarded equipment on site, impacting productivity of soil.

Additionally, there were requests for general education improvements regarding personal practices to reduce individual impact on the environment ranging from more engagement in schools to free information sessions at community centers/gathering spaces.

**Comments:**

- Educational programs for communities, farmers/ranchers, schools and industries
- Bring hands-on agriculture education back to schools
- Incentivize recycling/waste management with iron, plastics and chemical waste
- Facilitate the use of manure management for farmers/ranchers as a fertilizer
- *State funded charging stations in rural areas*

- *Fair taxation across brackets to support all income levels*
- *Support small businesses/farmers to keep rural towns and families strong- they are the backbone of North Dakota*
- *Invest more in solar energy*

## 1.5 OTHER

**Question:** Is there anything else you want us to know on this topic?

Education was highlighted as a key opportunity, ranging from general education in schools/communities about environmental practices, to hands-on agricultural educational practices. Education regarding agricultural/ production practices also was recommended for bankers and insurance agents in rural farm communities so that they are more attuned to best practices. People in these positions are often seen as resources to farmers and will often make crop and/or program suggestions to farmers (specifically new farmers).

## 2. DISCUSSION OF EXAMPLE GHG REDUCTION STRATEGIES

To bring the conversation to a more tactical level, a series of greenhouse gas emissions reductions examples were displayed on posters during each session for participants' reactions. It was noted that these examples were not proposals, just examples of strategies that have been implemented in other communities.

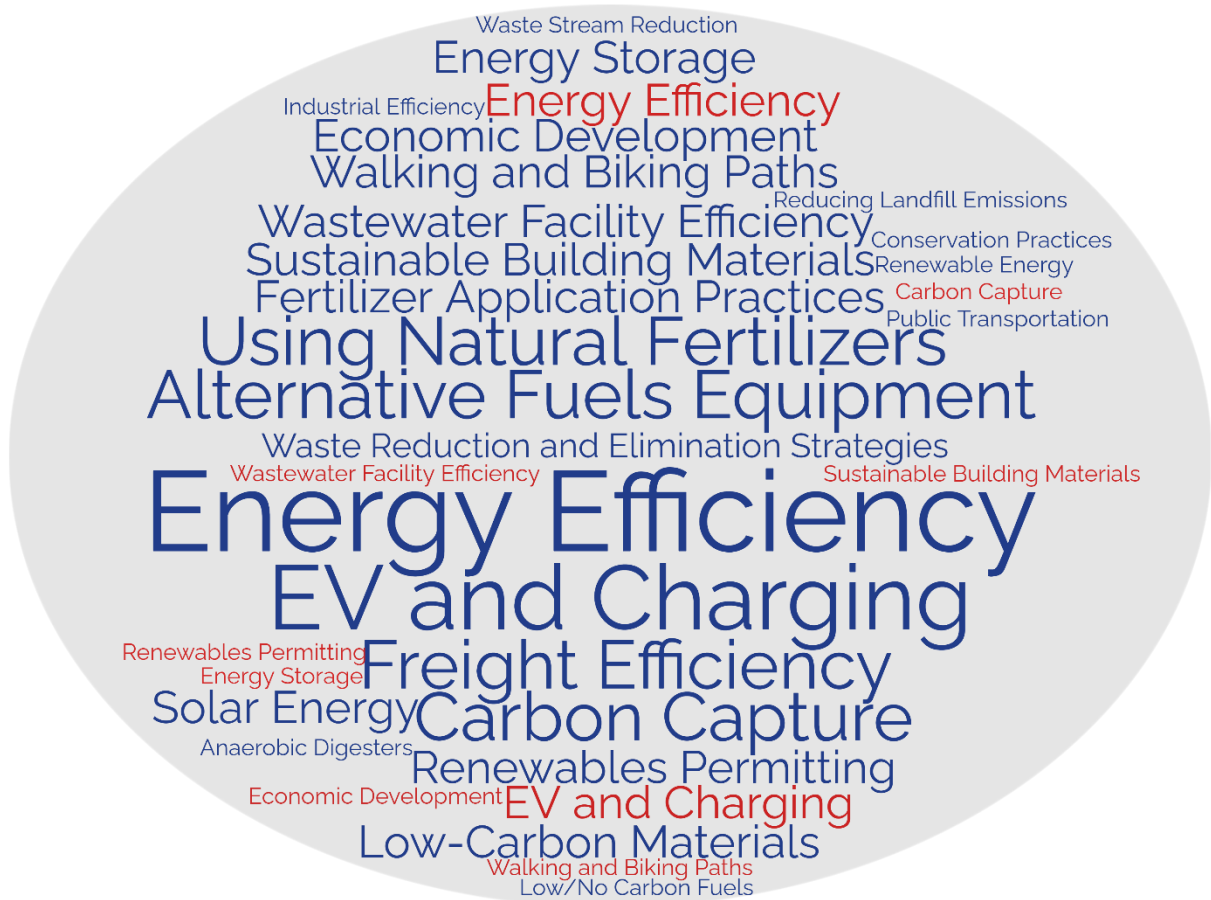
In-person participants were given red and blue sticker-dots to place next to any example on which they had an opinion. Blue was used to indicate support of an example for use in North Dakota; red indicated that they did not support the example for North Dakota. Participants were also given post-it notes to add additional examples, suggestions or comments/questions.

Online participants received a link via the chat in Zoom to a Microsoft form with the same list of examples. They were given the option to click "support", "not support" or "skip" the question. They also were able to elaborate on their responses.

All participants were cautioned that this process was meant to gauge general support or opposition to the various examples, that they were not voting.

The following "word cloud" graphic depicts how often (larger letters = more dots) that examples were selected, and to what degree they were supported (blue) or not supported (red).

## SUMMARY OF REACTIONS



Note: The larger the type, the more often a strategy received a dot during this activity in Devils Lake.

Blue type = support. Red type = do not support.

In addition to placing red or blue dots on sample greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies posters, participants were invited to discuss the options and compare reactions to the sample strategies.

Strategy	Verbatim Comments
Renewable Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I want it to be easier, more cost-effective to have solar panels on my house. I would share with my neighbors.</li> <li>I'm all for renewable energy projects. But they have to be sustainable over the long term, like 25 years. I'm more for incentivizing existing facilities to be more efficient.</li> </ul>
Waste Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would love to hear more on composting for individuals, retailers and whole communities.</li> </ul>

Conservation Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Dakota is the land of few trees. How might we incentivize people to plant trees?</li> <li>• It's painful to see shelter belts get knocked down and not getting replaced.</li> <li>• Improving crop rotations over the long term would be beneficial from a land management standpoint.</li> <li>• Crop insurance deadlines and bankers need to be based on seasonal demands and crop rotation demands. For example, you can't put a cover crop in after September 5th through some programs.</li> <li>• Common sense needs to come into play with some programs.</li> </ul>
Carbon Capture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thousands and thousands of dollars are spent to get lots cleaned out and hauled out and then put back in the ground. Why can't we create a facility to capture that?</li> <li>• There's a bridge that needs to be built between crop production and ranching.</li> </ul>
Fertilizer Application Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No-till is more prevalent in the western part of the state. As you move east, a full no-till situation may not make sense, but maybe produced reduced tilling.</li> </ul>
Carbon Capture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have question marks behind carbon capture. Is it sustainable or even possible? And what would those unintended consequences be?</li> <li>• At the end of the day, our food is more important than anything. Feeding the world is more important. So if sinking carbon into the earth harms crops, I'd rather just keep it up in the air.</li> </ul>
Energy Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy efficiency is good, but we also have to make a good product that lasts and can be fixed locally. Otherwise, we're just creating more waste.</li> </ul>
Anaerobic Digesters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm curious. But I don't think there are enough animals to make it worth it.</li> </ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainability gives North Dakotans marketing advantages, such as environmentally conscious flour.</li> </ul>

### 3. WAYS TO ENGAGE

Sustainability Input Forums and the corresponding online survey were the first in a series of engagement opportunities led by North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality in support of long-term sustainability planning and North Dakota's collective greenhouse gas emissions reductions work.

Video recordings, reports, notices of future engagement opportunities, and additional methods to provide feedback may be found at the NDDEQ website: <https://deq.nd.gov/sustainability/>

For additional information, contact Jennifer Skjod, NDDEQ Public Information Officer, via email at [jskjod@nd.gov](mailto:jskjod@nd.gov)

Thank you to those who shared their passions and wisdom as part of this conversation.

## APPENDIX - EXAMPLE STRATEGIES

The following examples were provided as examples of greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies being implemented in U.S. communities. These examples were provided by ERM to generate discussion and reaction during North Dakota Sustainability Input Forums. Please note that these were not provided as proposals, nor were participants asked to rank or vote on them.

### Energy Implementation and Development

- **Renewable Energy** - Incentives for installing renewable energy and energy storage systems on commercial properties
- **Energy Efficiency** - Incentives for installing end-use energy efficiency measures in commercial and residential buildings
- **Financing Programs** - Establish a financing program (e.g., grants or low-interest loans) for energy efficiency and renewable energy installations in new and existing buildings
- **Electric Vehicles and Charging** - Incentives to increase the share of electric vehicles (e.g., leasing and purchasing), and to expand electric vehicle charging infrastructure
- **Carbon Capture** - Programs to support or incentivize carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS) at industrial and energy facilities
- **Industrial Efficiency** - Programs to support or incentivize implementation of energy efficiency measures in industry, including energy audits, strategic energy management, equipment upgrades, and waste heat utilization
- **Low/No Carbon Fuels** - Programs to support or incentivize greenhouse gas emission reductions in industrial energy use and industrial processes, including use of low/no carbon fuels, electrification, renewable energy, and process improvements
- **Low-Carbon Materials** - Programs to develop, expand, and support markets for low-embodied carbon materials and products, such as cement and steel
- **Renewables Permitting** - Streamline permitting for renewable energy projects
- **Waste Stream Reduction** - Increase the efficiency or effectiveness of waste reduction, reuse, recycling, or composting programs. Reducing the amount of materials entering landfills.
- **Wastewater Facility Efficiency** - Incentives for installing renewable energy and energy efficiency measures at wastewater treatment facilities
- **Reducing Landfill Emissions** - Incentives to reduce methane emissions from landfills and wastewater treatment facilities, including through collection for use

### Agriculture

- **Anerobic Digesters** - Incentives to promote anaerobic digesters to capture methane and generate renewable energy or produce renewable fuel
- **Alternative Fuels Equipment** - Incentive programs to fund agricultural equipment technologies that use alternative fuels
- **Fertilizer Application Practices** - Incentives for technologies and techniques that reduce nitrous oxide emissions from fertilizer application such as precision agriculture practices
- **Using Natural Fertilizers** – Reinforcing soil health with the life cycle of the animal





- **Conservation Practices** - Implement programs that support best practices in agricultural conservation to help protect soil health, including cover crops, no-till, other runoff reduction techniques
- **Economic Development** - Programs for local and regional economic development partners to establish food- and agriculture-based economic development strategies, such as community-based food co-ops

### **Community, Public Service and Government**

- **Solar Energy** - Increase access and funding for solar panels on your home or businesses in your community
- **Energy Efficiency** - Funding for increasing energy efficiency in your home or businesses in your community, including proper insulation
- **Electric Vehicles and Charging** - Increasing electric vehicle charging stations in your community
- **Sustainable Building Materials** - Utilizing sustainable building materials for your local buildings
- **Public Transportation** - Increasing the availability and access to public transportation in your community
- **Walking and Biking Paths** - Additional walking and biking paths in your community
- **Energy Storage** - Funding for battery technology to store solar energy at commercial businesses
- **Waste Reduction and Elimination Strategies** - Providing residential recycling and composting service
- **Freight Efficiency** - Increasing efficiency in freight movement.