Sustainability Input Forums

Input received in Fargo, ND

PREPARED FOR

NORTH Dakota Be Legendary.™ | Environmental Quality

DATE
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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, 2023.

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 Fargo. Subsequent input received through the online comment form are italicized and attributed to this report based on ZIP codes indicated.

CONTEXT

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

NDDEQ's 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, with comments provided by participants in the form of verbal feedback, comment cards, and online polls and chats.

Located on the lower level of the West Acres Shopping Mall, the Community Room comfortably hosted the three Sustainability Input Forums in Fargo. The chairs were oriented in a U shape. The camera was centered behind the group with a Bluetooth microphone/speaker placed at the center of the circle to capture video and audio for Zoom participants and the recording.

Hosts for the forums were Ann Fritz, NDDEQ; Renee Hoyos, ERM, Facilitator; Monica Zattera, ERM, Online Facilitator.

Attendees included various individuals from across industries and interests including, but not limited to, family farmers, agricultural industry professionals, economists, public officials, retirees, students and local residents with a passion for the environment, prairielands, forestry and action on climate change. A total of 33 Fargo-area residents contributed input.

1. CONVERSATION SUMMARIES

The conversation was educational and well-received by attendees. Participants said they were pleasantly surprised by the informal and conversational nature of the forums as opposed to a traditional public hearing session. Concerns focused primarily on agricultural practices, education opportunities, and the need for a collective approach with various solutions. Fargo participants noted that cultural hurdles are present and have been in place for generations that make it difficult to find common ground on these topics.

Further details of discussion topics follow. Online comments from the region, but submitted subsequent to the meeting dates, have been noted in *italicized type.* Please note that 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?

In general, the group agreed that there are many potential benefits, and they would like to work towards them. However, concern for how they will be measured and if they would see them in their lifetime was mentioned. Some participants admitted to having a hard time fully comprehending the benefits as realistic and tangible, but ultimately agreed that change is possible.

Comments:

- Cleaner air
- Fewer extreme weather events
- Improved quality of life
- Lower carbon emissions
- Improved perception of North Dakotans' attitudes toward the environment
- Improved sunlight exposure for crops
- Maintain planet for future generations
- Less production cost
- Soil and water health
- Economic opportunity
- Growth of renewable fuels
- Increased market opportunities for commodities
- Remain competitive on global markets
- Diversify economy
- *Be a good neighbor to our country*
- *Encourage Innovation*
- *Healthier animals*
- *Waste reduction by utilizing biodiesel made from fat/cooking oil waste*
- *Reduce dependency on fleeting fossil fuels*

- *Energy security: reduce reliance on foreign oil production providing protection against geopolitical instability*
- *Rural development with additional income opportunities*
- *Additional jobs*
- *Slow global warming*
- *Increased resiliency*
- *Decrease in climate related refugees*

1.2 DOWNSIDES

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

Participants voiced concern for the cost of transitioning to newer, more environmentally friendly practices. Many reiterated that they are concerned with peoples' resistance to change and voiced that many farmers they have encountered in their professions have resisted change due to the fact it is too expensive for the lack of change perceived as rapid change will also cause a shift in the economy that not everyone can afford. It was also mentioned that many of the suggested changes do not align with the lifestyle and living conditions, being as far North as they are. Electric vehicles are helping, but they are unable to meet the needs of ND for the scope of large-scale machinery. They are expensive and cannot withstand our winters. The production of these vehicles is not factored into its carbon emissions and participants are concerned about the production of the materials to build vehicles outweighing the benefits. Electric vehicles can also add to a class system and isolate those who cannot afford to transition.

Comments:

- How are we measuring improvements?
- Potential cost to producers
- Cost of new infrastructure
- Risk to public health
- Dramatic change to oil and Agriculture based economy
- Added controversy- misinformation
- Time consuming
- Change of traditional practices causes unrest
- Reduced power in engine units/equipment
- Loss of local control over regulation
- Destruction of current economic model
- Less reliable power grid
- Product affordability
- Loss of jobs and need for alternative revenue
- *Cost outweighs the benefits by adding emissions elsewhere in the production of new materials*
- *There are no downsides*
- *No readily available solutions to heavy-duty transportation/machinery*

1.3 EXISTING EFFORTS

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

Much of the conversation focused on North Dakota farmers already implementing adaptive practices. Various participants called for more inclusive programs that rewarded those who have already been utilizing recommended practices. Mention of additional programs including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Soil Conservation District, Land and Water Conservation and the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund for farmers was discussed and the state was encouraged to engage more with these programs/organizations. Attendees also recognized rebates/tax credits for homes that transition to energy efficient appliances and rate differentials provided by utility companies. Additionally, ND DOT completed an electric vehicle study; in Fargo specifically, they are looking into the readiness for the city to transition.

Comments:

- Wind turbines
- Rebates/tax credits for energy efficient appliances
- Farmers/ranchers using adaptive practices
- Scrubbers on smokestacks
- Prairieland research on species impacted
- USDA
- Soil Conservation Districts
- Land and Water Conservation
- Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) incentivizing farmers for changes and food stewardship
- DEF fluid and biofuels
- Underground storage
- Utility companies offering peak differential rates
- Red Tail Energy- CCS
- Primacy for Class VI VIC wells
- Electric vehicles
- Methane capture
- *Nonprofits like Audubon and Pheasants Forever*
- *Recycling concrete for roads*
- *Development of carbon capture and sequestration technologies*
- *Production of renewable diesel by Marathon Petroleum at South Heart*
- *Biodiesel by ADM at Velva*
- *Additional bus stops increasing accessibility*
- *Ethanol-based public transportation*
- *Private solar power*
- *I don’t know*

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 asked for more collaboration between existing programs and the government to further support agricultural practices as the transitioned. They also asked for less urbanization and more incentivization for the preservation of grasslands to help with air quality and environmental improvements. Participants mentioned a need for balance and support to return low-yield cropland to grasslands. Community members also want to see more government funded solar gardens, green spaces, and habitat sanctuaries in addition to education and more robust recycling practices.

Comments:

- Create net metering
- Solar community gardens
- Focus more on funding transition to energy efficiency
- Incorporate people from solar and clean energy on[to] the sustainable energy authority
- Balance planting incentives by making more environmentally friendly choices like grasslands vs corn more economically obtainable
- Establish solar panel and wind turbine recycling
- Reward those who are already working towards environmentally friendly practices
- Invest in precision fertilizer application practices/research
- Develop and fund educational programs for farmers to improve practices
- Promote/work closer with the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund and other programs
- Incentivize producers to convert low yield land back to pastures/grasslands
- Research measuring carbon sequestration
- More environmentally friendly building codes and ordinances
- Madate recycling bins in multifamily dwellings
- *Publicize what is currently being done to educate resident*
- *Incentivize composting facilities in larger cities*
- *State regulated climate friendly purchasing plan*
- *Create a private sector climate council*
- *Empower cities/municipalities through providing programs to report and track sustainability*
- *Pull all investments from fossil fuel and coal industry and redirect funding to clean energy*
- *Prioritize the production and use of biodiesel with state policies*
- *A sustainable surface utilization rating system- incorporating air, soil and water as touchstone receptors*
- *Air quality monitors*

1.5 OTHER

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

- One participant from the session wanted to challenge the state to think about how they can create environmentally sustainable building practices, codes, and ordinances

- Participants also asked for more information about the electric vehicle transition and asked for additional investment in EV charging stations
- Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) and carbon filtering are different. CCS is not a solution in ND
- There is a huge lack of sustainable options including basic recycling services in multifamily dwellings
- Is the Department of DEI [diversity equity and inclusion] included to ensure equitable distribution or resources once available?
- Increase amount of EV charging stations
- *Thank you for doing this!*
- *Shipping waste or raw product out of the state to be recycled is not a reasonable solution*
- *Add additional incentives for creating wild habitats within neighborhoods*

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 Fargo.

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
Electric Vehicles and Charging	• Electric vehicles are a promising idea, but it is going to be challenging to move beyond charging stations along interstate highways. • Increase the share of electric vehicles through leasing and purchasing
Building Materials	• Design standards and building codes make it difficult to try new building materials.
Renewable Energy	• The best bet for ensuring a sustainable energy grid and reducing greenhouse gases is to keep pushing clean air standards and using the best available technology at coal-fired plants. Then supplement the grid with renewable energy sources. • I'm supportive of installing solar on commercial properties. • Incentivize renewable energy on new construction. • How about solar panels on barns? • One thing I think of related to solar energy is how much room those panels take and we're sitting on some of the best farmland in the world. (Generated an extensive discussion of possibilities such as elevated panels, compatibility with sheep grazing, etc.) • Incorporate people from solar and clean energy on the sustainable energy authority
Renewables Permitting	• Permitting is already streamlined. It is a messy process to permit renewable energy because it's disruptive. For example, a wind farm takes up many square miles and has people who live there must deal with windmill sights and sounds. I don't think you can streamline anymore without ignoring the public. • When compared to the noise of motorcycles and big trucks, the sound of wind farms is minimal.
Carbon Capture	• I would be more supportive of filtering carbon off coal plants versus the Summit model. • Carbon capture is not reducing, just putting underground instead of releasing into the air. • Carbon filtering and carbon capture are two very different projects.
Public Transportation	• Fargo already has increased access to public transportation. Investing more just would not have as much impact. Another participant said: Buses bought recently, though, were diesel, not hybrid or electric like the rest of the country. • I'm in favor of expanding public transportation, but I'd like it to be more towards an electrical or hybrid. • Look at Europe. To make trains work, they made extensive plans to make cities walkable. It wasn't magic, it was planning, policies, and incentives.
Walking and Biking Trails	• When the diversion construction is done, Fargo will have 30 miles of recreational trails. That's already happening.
Landfill Emissions	• Fargo already is capturing emissions from landfills, cleaning it, and selling it. • Discussion included whether this creates a reduction or just redirects gas to beneficial use. • It took an upfront investment to get methane collection going, but it paid off for Fargo in four years and now it's just profit for the city.
Waste Stream Reductions	• We have a lack of sustainability options, such as recycling.

Conservation Practices	• Make the NRCS programs more educational or you could have the Department of Agriculture working with Extension to provide more conservation practice programming. • Include conservation practices in more ag degrees.
Anaerobic Digesters	• I would not be against putting them on existing projects and reducing the carbon for existing feedlots, but putting up new ones would actually incentivize large lots and increase the carbon. Digesters require a large scale to make sense.
Other	• Is the Department of DEI included to ensure equitable distribution or resources once available?

3. WAYS TO ENGAGE

Sustainability Listening 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

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.