

Quarterly Viewpoint

FROM THE DESK OF JACKIE WILKINS

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Farmers are taking center stage in the national discussions on environmental solutions and climate change, and the current administration sees farmers as a critical partner. In addition to the ongoing efforts to address sustainability via environmental stewardship, nutrient management, and water quality best practices, farmers are now being called on to take the lead in reducing carbon emissions. The goal is to farm in such a way as to enable crops to capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in the soil, thus reducing the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that contribute to atmospheric warming. A variety of incentives are being introduced to encourage carbon sequestration and increase carbon markets and the participation of farmers in this new “commodity crop.” In fact, storing carbon is one of the hottest topics in agriculture right now, because it can provide an income stream for farmers while addressing environmental concerns. However, many questions remain about how the carbon markets will work and how farmers can best be prepared to benefit from them when approached about selling their carbon credits.

Before signing a long-term contract, farmers will need to be able to determine their carbon footprint baselines, understand carbon credits and the carbon market, know if and when to sell and at what price, and be optimally prepared to make decisions about short- and long-term investments. Ohio State University Extension is addressing this need by hiring an Extension carbon sequestration specialist in partnership with the Rattan Lal Carbon Management and Sequestration Center at The Ohio State University, who will work closely with the Extension carbon team and the CFAES Knowledge Exchange to create a one-stop-shop for science-based information on all things carbon. Together, this team will be a resource for Ohio farmers and producers, industry leaders and professionals, and youth by: providing vital Extension education and training on soil carbon and soil health improvements as well as increasing the use of sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices; developing carbon management and sequestration programs including soil organic carbon, soil health, carbon markets, economics, payments for ecosystem services, the soil carbon cycle at farm level, and life-cycle analysis of farm production; and collaborating with other university and industry researchers, faculty, and Extension educators for on-farm research and education on soil carbon management and sequestration as well as soil health, urban soil remediation, sustainable agriculture, and community food systems. Farmers will need more questions answered about this new commodity crop before they sign on the bottom line, and our college researchers and Extension will be here to help.

Sincerely,



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