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USDA Announces Appointments to the Greenhouse Gas Technical Assistance Provider and Third-Party Verifier Program Advisory Council

Blue Diamond Growers' Head of Sustainability, Dr. Dan Sonke, selected for two-year term

WASHINGTON, Jan. 7, 2025 - Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the appointment of 36 members to serve on the newly formed Greenhouse Gas Technical Assistance Provider and Third-Party Verifier Program Advisory Council, informally referred to as the Growing Climate Solutions Act Advisory Council.

The council will support the Greenhouse Gas Technical Assistance Provider and Third-Party Verifier Program in facilitating the participation in voluntary environmental credit markets by farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners, including beginning, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and veteran farmers. Key activities of the council will include periodically reviewing and recommending changes to the protocols recognized by the program for generating environmental credits, the required qualifications for entities that provide technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, and landowners, and the activities available to farmers, ranchers, and landowners under the program to prevent, reduce, or mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

"The representatives appointed to this council provide a robust cross section of knowledge and experience to help farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners understand how to use science-based practices to reduce emissions, sequester carbon on their land and access new income streams through carbon markets," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "The council is key in helping reduce barriers that have hindered the participation of agriculture in voluntary carbon markets and their efforts will ensure consistency, reliability, effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency in these markets."

The council will advise the Secretary of Agriculture on: (1) current methods used in voluntary environmental credit markets to quantify and verify the prevention, reduction, or mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions; and (2) ways to reduce the barriers to entry and transaction costs associated with such markets. The council will also submit an initial assessment to Congress about the program, and it will consult with the Secretary regarding subsequent periodic assessments.

Members appointed to the council are:



Federal Government Employees

Nikola Smith, Washington, D.C., USDA Forest Service (1-year term)
James Whetstone, Maryland, National Institute of Standards and Technology (2-year term)
Kathryn Zook, Washington, D.C., USDA Office of Energy and Environmental Policy (3-year term)
Venus Welch-White, Washington, D.C., Environmental Protection Agency (1-year term)

Agriculture Industry

Brent Bible, Indiana (3-year term)
John Bidart, California (3-year term)
Patrick Brown, North Carolina (3-year term)
Grace Brown, Texas (1-year term)
Jeanne Carver, Oregon (2-year term)
Andrea Chu, Texas (1-year term)
Sara Cover, Nebraska (1-year term)
Courtney Hall, Minnesota (3-year term)
Mitchell Hora, Iowa (2-year term)
Brandon Hunnicutt, Nebraska (3-year term)
Mark Isbell, Arkansas (3-year term)
Tom McDonald, Colorado (3-year term)
Roger Noonan, New Hampshire (1-year term)
Dan Sonke, California (2-year term)
Thomas Titus, Illinois (2-year term)

Private Forest Landowners or the Forestry and Forest Products Industry

Claire Getty, Tennessee (2-year term)
Edie Hall, Washington, D.C. (3-year term)
Rachael Jamison, Washington, D.C. (2-year term)
Hector Restrepo, North Carolina (2-year term)

Scientific Research Community

Ann Bartuska, Washington, D.C. (2-year term)
Timothy Baye, Wisconsin (1-year term)
Jason Rowntree, Michigan (3-year term)

Voluntary Environmental Credit Market Expertise

Ryan Schauland, California (3-year term)
McKenzie Smith, California (2-year term)

Nongovernmental or Civil Society Organization



Nathan Truitt, Washington, D.C. (2-year term)
Bryan Van Stippen, Minnesota (3-year term)
Carrie Vollmer-Sanders, Washington, D.C. (1-year term)

Private Sector Voluntary Carbon Market Participation

Max DuBuisson, Massachusetts (3-year term)
Kate Ivancic, Minnesota (2-year term)
Spencer Plumb, Washington, D.C. (1-year term)

Other Individuals Deemed Necessary by the Secretary

Ben Nelson, Iowa (2-year term)
Julius Pasay, Oregon (1-year term)

Terms for this initial board are staggered, as outlined in the Growing Climate Solutions Act. At least fifty-one percent of the council must be active farmers, ranchers, or private forest landowners.

For more information about the council, visit the [Greenhouse Gas Technical Assistance Provider and Third-Party Verifier Program Advisory Council](#) website or contact Sasha Strohm, Program Manager, at Sasha.Strohm@usda.gov or 202-720-5705.

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About Blue Diamond Growers®

Blue Diamond Growers, a grower-owned cooperative representing nearly 3,000 of California's almond growers, is the world's leading almond marketer and processor. Established in 1910, it created the California almond industry and opened world markets for almonds. Blue Diamond is dedicated to delivering the benefits of almonds around the world and does so by providing high-quality almonds, almond ingredients, and branded products. Headquartered in Sacramento, the company employs approximately 1,400 people throughout its processing plants, receiving stations and gift shops. To learn more about Blue Diamond Growers, visit www.BlueDiamond.com and follow the company on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.