

State, nation must set energy goals

By Cam Metcalf

This summer, the U. S. Senate and the House of Representatives took steps to lessen our nation's dependence on foreign oil, strengthen the economy and improve the environment through passage of energy legislation that will increase efficiency, expand biofuels production, provide funds for research and development and, in the case of the House, provide tax incentives to spur greater production of renewable energy.

These measures represent primary building blocks for a new energy future, but until a final energy bill is produced in conference, passed by both bodies and signed into law by the president, America's energy future is still in question.

A critical first step on the path to a new energy future is to clearly define what that future should be. Over the past two years, a diverse group of agricultural, environmental and business leaders -- including top executives at GM, Ford and Chrysler -- have been working to do just that, and have articulated a goal of securing 25 percent of the nation's energy needs from renewable forms of energy by the year 2025.

Kentucky, along with 25 other states and more than 100 members of Congress have endorsed the group's 25x'25 renewable energy goal, as have nearly 600 organizations across the country.

This is a worthy goal that the whole country can get behind, and more important, it is a goal we can achieve.

The Kentucky Rural Energy Consortium and its partners, through the development of a 25x'25 Roadmap for Kentucky, will detail strategies that could result in achieving 25 percent of Kentucky's total energy consumption from renewable resources by the year 2025.

To generate public interest and support, the consortium is sponsoring town hall meetings and other outreach initiatives to explore ideas for developing the roadmap. These initiatives showcase how Kentucky's mix of crops, livestock, natural resources and transportation make the state uniquely positioned to become a leader in renewable energy development.

A 25x'25 plan dramatically will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, cutting imports by 2.5 million barrels a day. Meeting the 25x'25 goal would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 1 billion tons annually -- two-thirds of projected emissions growth by 2025.

Equally important, a 25x'25 energy future will strengthen the national economy, create new jobs and provide new revenue streams for a large sector of the country -- rural America -- one that is struggling to remain viable.

A recent University of Tennessee study has shown that a 25x'25 energy future will yield major economic benefits for Kentucky. The study said that a 25 percent renewable energy platform would increase net farm income in the state by \$1.93 billion, provide a whopping \$17.8 billion annual boost to the overall economy and generate nearly 162,000 new well-paid jobs along the way.

At the national level, the Senate recognized the importance of a renewable energy future by unanimously adopting the 25x'25 goal as part of the energy legislation it passed in June. Support in the House continues to grow. The House Agriculture Committee has adopted a resolution backing 25x'25, and the measure has the bipartisan support of more than 70 co-sponsors.

Congress will begin to finalize energy legislation by reconciling differences between the Senate and House bills. The 25x'25 goal would be an important part of the final bill that emerges.

Without a unifying goal, the end result could very well be a hodgepodge of energy initiatives that don't take us where we need to go as quickly as we need to get there.

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