

**Remarks by Stephen L. Johnson
Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
at the
USDA Agricultural Air Quality Task Force
Bethesda, MD**

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Thank you, Chief Bruce Knight, for that warm introduction.

Let me begin by expressing my appreciation to the Chief and his boss, Secretary Johanns, for the strong working partnership we have between our two agencies.

As you have seen during your meetings, USDA and EPA share many of the same environmental and agriculture issues. As this list continues to grow, I value the Secretary's friendship and counsel. I believe that our nation's environment and our agriculture are better off because of this cooperation.

I also want to recognize the members of this task force for your willingness to lend your time and expertise on addressing our shared challenges. My agriculture advisor, Jon Scholl, has frequently commented on the expertise and dedication you bring to the discussions of air quality issues involving agriculture. Since becoming Administrator about a year ago, there have been several occasions where I have benefited from the input and advice of your members. Today, I would like to offer my personal thanks for the contributions you all have made to our nation's environmental well-being.

Instead of being viewed by some as a source of conflict, today EPA is proud to be a source of cooperation. We have learned that when acting alone, mandating rules and regulations, our progress is incremental. When we work in cooperation with our partners – including the agriculture community – we can build on the environmental gains we have already achieved.

As Administrator, I want EPA to collaborate with our partners to understand the practical implications of our actions ... I want EPA to be a part of a constructive problem-solving strategy that will reach our collective economic and environmental objectives.

The culture of environmental stewardship has been an integral part of farm families for generations. EPA would like to build on that history of caring for the land to find innovative ways to address our air quality challenges. I know that by working together, we can develop solutions that are both economically reasonable and that preserve our shared environment.

We see the Animal Feeding Operations Consent Agreement as a step with the right direction. By working hand-in-hand with livestock producers, more than 2,700 firms,

representing over 7,000 farms animal feeding operations, have signed agreements for EPA's air compliance initiative.

EPA believes that this consent agreement is the quickest, most efficient way to address the current uncertainty regarding air emissions from animal feeding operations.

This collaboration will provide EPA and the farming community with the background needed to determine if, in fact, animal feeding operations have any Clean Air Act compliance issues. The agreement will also ensure that EPA has the data we to make informed policy decisions based on sound science.

Your task force has helped highlight the unique needs of the agriculture community relating to air quality. Your valuable input has included recommendations regarding the need for better science to help quantify emission factors, and the identification of possible best management practices to help mitigate air quality concerns.

And as we continue to build toward a bright and healthy future, EPA will ensure that the best available science remains at the center of our decision making.

Based on the best available science, EPA has recently proposed to strengthen national air quality standards for fine particulate matter - the pollution that reduces visibility and impacts human health.

At this time, our best available scientific information does not suggest that rural, agricultural sources of coarse particulates pose a significant health threat. Over the next couple of years, we will continue to study and learn more about the impact of agriculture on coarse particle pollution.

During the public comment period, I am counting on the active participation of those with expertise in agricultural air quality issues ... like you ... to contribute to the body of knowledge which will be used to finalize our proposal.

As the first EPA Administrator with a scientific background, I know that sound scientific research and analysis is the basis of our achievements and the genesis of our future successes. I will continue to ensure that the best available science remains at the center of EPA's decision-making process.

I believe that agriculture is the producer of solutions, not the creator of problems. And as Administrator, I want to involve the agriculture community in making the decisions that directly affect their very livelihoods.

I am pleased you invited me, and other members of EPA's staff, to be a part of your meetings. I trust your discussion with them will be informative and productive.

All of us agree that our farmland is one of our nation's greatest national treasures. I am told I am the first Administrator of EPA to meet with this task force – please take this as a

sign of our desire to work with you to address the air quality issues that challenge our nation and your industry.

We have an obligation to pass the land down to the next generation enhanced and not depleted. By working together, EPA and the agriculture community can ensure the continued use and conservation of this natural resource.

Thank you again, and best wishes for a successful meeting.