

May 22, 2024

The Honorable Glenn Thompson
Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Opposition to Farm Bill Section 12417 – Qualified Renewable Biomass

Dear Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott:

We are writing today to object to the inclusion of proposed language in the Farm Bill that would declare, by legislative fiat and in stark juxtaposition to the stances of numerous scientific authorities, that woody or forest biomass and related facilities have a greenhouse gas emission rate or carbon intensity of zero or less and are presumptively carbon neutral.

This language defies climate science and would place many rural communities at risk. At the smokestack, the use of woody biomass for electricity is inefficient and emissive, both in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and in health-harming co-pollutants. Communities have actively resisted biomass-burning facilities. The growth of the wood pellet industry to produce pellets for export, fundamentally based on the same faulty premise of carbon neutrality, has produced a tremendous public health toll. They emit harmful air pollutants including particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds, as well as hazardous air pollutants like acrolein and methanol. The burden of the co-pollutants from both biopower and biomass densification has overwhelmingly fallen upon economically distressed and environmental justice communities.

Government policies should be based on accurate accounting of the life cycle climate impacts of biomass. We must consider the amount of climate pollution generated when harvesting, transporting, and processing wood, as well as combusting it. Doing so reveals that, even if new trees are planted, it would take too long for new trees to catch up and recapture carbon — anywhere from 40 to 100 years or more, well beyond the time frame in which the world must cut carbon pollution to address the worst impacts of climate change. Intensification of harvests can also impair forest health and resilience. And contrary to industry claims, much of the wood that is used for energy generation is not simply “waste.”

The Farm Bill should provide resources to improve the lives of rural communities and keep American families fed with healthy food, not meddle with scientific principles to benefit a single industry at the expense of already overburdened communities and necessary climate action. This language should be removed from the legislation.

Sincerely,

National and regional organizations

National Wildlife Federation
Southern Environmental Law Center
Alaska Wilderness League
American Bird Conservancy
Center for Biological Diversity
Conservation Northwest
Dogwood Alliance
Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Law & Policy Center
Friends of the Earth US
Green America
Heartwood
John Muir Project

Natural Resources Defense Council
League of Conservation Voters
Mighty Earth
Partnership for Policy Integrity
Patagonia
Public Employees for Environmental
Responsibility
Rachel Carson Council
Sierra Club
Southern Forests Conservation Coalition
WildEarth Guardians
Women's Earth and Climate Action Network
(WECAN)
350.org

State and local organizations

Alabama Interfaith Power & Light
Alliance for Community Engagement SW WA
Appalachia Fungorum LLC
Athens County's Future Action Network
Bee Friendly Williamstown
Biofuelwatch
Black Warrior Riverkeeper
Burlington Friends Meeting
California Environmental Justice Coalition
California Interfaith Power & Light
Carolina Wetlands Association
Cascadia Climate Action Now
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist
Environmental Justice Ministry
Central Valley Air Quality Coalition
Climate Action California
Climate Communications Coalition
Climate Reality Project – Portland chapter
Climate Reality Project – San Diego
Coastal Plain Conservation Group
Coexisting with Cougars in Klickitat County
Columbia Riverkeeper
Community Energy reSource
Concerned Citizens of Cook County
Connecticut River Defenders
Cowlitz County Democratic Women
Dietrick Institute for Applied Insect Ecology

Doctors and Scientists Against Wood Smoke
Pollution
Earth Law Center
Elders Climate Action
Environmental Justice Coalition for Water
Environmental Protection Information Center
Food Empowerment Project
Forest Keeper
Friends of the Locust Fork River
Georgia Interfaith Power and Light
Global Justice Ecology Project
Greater Greener Gloster
Green Arlington MA
Green Berkshires, Inc.
Greenenvironment, LLC
Hardscrabble Associates
Haw River Assembly
Kettle Range Conservation Group
Klamath Forest Alliance
Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Legal Rights for the Salish Sea
Little Manila Rising
Locust Point Community Garden
Los Padres ForestWatch
Lower Columbia Indivisible
Lower Columbia Stewardship Community
Massachusetts Forest Watch
Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light, Inc.

MCAT Mobilizing Climate Action Together
Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center
Mountain Valley Climate Action
NC Climate Justice Collective
NC League of Conservation Voters
NC WARN
North Parish of North Andover Climate Justice
Group
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness
Ohio Environmental Council
Old-Growth Forest Network
Oregon Wild
Our Revolution Massachusetts-Climate Crisis
Working Group
PATH Ashfield
Pivot Point, A Nonprofit Corporation
Planet Protectors Laboratory, Baltimore Wisdom
Project
Plastic Ocean Project, Inc.
Program for Preserving the Natural World Inc.
Protect Our Woods
RESTORE: The North Woods
Robeson County Cooperative for Sustainable
Development
Santa Cruz Climate Action Network
Save Massachusetts Forests
Sentinels of Eastern Shore Health
Silvix Resources
Sonoma County Climate Activist Network
Spruill Conservation Farm
Standing Trees
Stop BTV Biomass, Inc.
Sunflower Alliance

Sustain Charlotte
The Enviro Show
The Peanut Factory, Inc.
The People's Justice Council
Toxic Free North Carolina
Trees as a Public Good Network
Twin Harbors Waterkeeper
Umpqua Natural Leadership Science Hub
Upper Valley Affinity Group
Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment
We Advocate Thorough Environmental Review
Wendell State Forest Alliance
West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe
Jobs
West End Revitalization Association
Western Watersheds Project
Wild Orca
Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands &
Communities
Winyah Rivers Alliance
Women's International League of Peace and
Freedom Triangle Branch
350 Bay Area Action
350 Humboldt
350 Sacramento
350 Seattle
350 PDX