



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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## **Agriculture panel explores climate change impacts and opportunities for farmers**

**OLYMPIA** – As Washington experiences longer summers, higher temperatures, reduced snow pack, and more extreme weather events, the state’s farmers and ranchers are wondering what the impact will be to their bottom line. As some of the most climate-dependent business owners in the state, farmers may have the most to lose.

A group of Washington’s most innovative agriculture producers are joining university researchers, natural resource conservationists and advocates for agriculture to take an in-depth look at the risks presented by global climate change, as well as the potential opportunities.

The Agricultural Working Group on Climate Change Mitigation, part of the state’s effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, met for the first time this week in Moses Lake. Over the next four months, the panel will explore how climate change will impact growing conditions, yields, commodity prices, input costs and other factors.

“Our research on global climate change points to some serious areas of concern for Washington’s agriculture economy,” said Chad Kruger of the Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources at Washington State University, one of the panel’s co-leaders. “The benefits of a longer, warmer growing season may be outweighed by reductions in available water for irrigation.”

The panel will also look at the positive and potentially profitable role agriculture can play in sequestering carbon from the atmosphere in plants, thereby reducing the impact of emissions from other sources. Under a proposed regional “cap and trade” system, farmers could generate additional income by selling carbon emission reduction credits to power plants and others required to reduce carbon emissions.

“Climate change does present some opportunities for our growers,” said Kirk Cook, a hydrogeologist with the Washington State Department of Agriculture, the other co-lead of the panel. “Our producers are already implementing innovative solutions, from generating electricity from animal waste to moving to lower impact farming practices. As a regional or national trading system comes on line, we want our producers to be positioned to generate revenue from these practices and others that can reduce the impact of pollution.”

Washington’s 33,000 farmers produced \$6.7 billion in agriculture products in 2006. The state is a leading producer of tree fruit, wine grapes and other commodities that could play a meaningful role in carbon sequestration. The food and agriculture industry of the state is estimated to employ 160,000 workers and generate \$34 billion in sales.

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Additional information about the Agricultural Working Group, as well as presentations, meeting schedules and names of the panelists, is available under “Forestry and Agriculture” at [www.ecy.wa.gov/climatechange](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/climatechange).

In October, the group will forward a series of recommendations to Governor Chris Gregoire’s Climate Action Team, led by Washington Department of Ecology Director Jay Manning and Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development Director Juli Wilkerson.

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