

Rethink urged on carbon

Key points

- Coverage for most farm unlikely
- Rules-based trading system suggested
- Verification issues need resolution

By **MATTHEW CAWOOD**

AUSTRALIAN agriculture is having the wrong debate about emissions trading, Dave Miller of the Iowa Farm Bureau told the Australian Farm Institute's Agriculture, Greenhouse and Emissions Trading conference at Maroochydore, Queensland, last week.

There is an assumption that individual farms will be somehow 'covered' under the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, but that is unlikely, Mr Miller said.

Instead, as in the United States, Mr Miller argues that the only businesses likely to be covered under the Australian scheme will be those producing more than 25,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents.

But Mr Miller argues lowering that target, especially to the farm level, introduces enormous complexity.

In the US, 85 per cent of national emissions are accounted for by covering the roughly 30,000 businesses that produce 25,000t or more of CO₂-e.

"If we go to 10,000t, we have 1.3 million reporting entities," he said.

"The government has made it very clear - why go from 30,000 entities to 1.3 million to account for another 2pc of emissions? It makes no sense."

"So for everyone under 25,000t of emissions, the ques-



tion is - how do you participate in the system?"

Mr Miller's advice is for agriculture to interface with the CPRS through a voluntary 'rules-based trading system' of emissions offsets and complementary measures, using similar market principles as the world's stock exchanges.

It is also the basis of the Chicago Climate Exchange, which operates a voluntary soil carbon trading scheme.

Mr Miller's other hat is as chief scientist for AgraGate, which aggregates about six million carbon credits for the CCX each year.

"Rules are written by the trading members so that neither side is advantaged or disadvantaged," Mr Miller said.

"The Chicago Climate Exchange is only voluntary to join; once you've joined, you're bound by the rules."

Biofarming beats emissions

TO DEMONSTRATE the role agriculture can play in permanently sequestering greenhouse gases into soil, Barry Vogt, Kapunda, hosted Lawrie & Co's Adrian Lawrie and former Governor-General Michael Jeffrey (all pictured) at his property Maryvale on Monday as part of the Biological Farming Systems Soil Carbon Tour.

The tour highlighted the greenhouse reduction and carbon sequestration results gained by South Australian and Victorian farmers by using biological products instead of fertiliser.

Mr Vogt uses the biological farming system on 400 hectares of his property and plans to expand this to 800ha next year. He says the BFS not only transferred atmospheric carbon dioxide into

soil carbon, but also improved soil fertility and sustainable agricultural production.

By spraying a biological product of beneficial microbes and fungi, instead of urea, he reduced his carbon emissions.

"We are helping to store carbon deep in the soil and by not adding nitrogenous fertilisers, we are also reducing gas emissions. The carbon that nitrogenous fertilisers release is a much bigger issue than most people realise," he said. In February 2008, soil tests on Mr Vogt's property produced soil organic carbon readings between 1.86 and 2.26 per cent. "It is the highest I have seen in a long time and you get a much more rapid increase in SOC than you do in any other way," he said.