

**REALITY CHECK PART II: THE IMPACT OF EPA'S  
PROPOSED OZONE STANDARDS ON RURAL AMERICA**

**Testimony by  
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**Before the  
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Subcommittee on Environment  
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Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.-

I had the great pleasure to listen to this committee's last hearing on this issue, and humbly come to you not as a scientist or a doctor or an economist. I am a farmer, with an Engineering Degree from Oklahoma State University. I was raised on a wheat and dairy farm near Nardin, Oklahoma. I continue to farm today and am Governor Mary Fallin's Secretary of Agriculture for the State of Oklahoma.

My only visual for my presentation is this picture of my farm near Nardin, Oklahoma on Easter Sunday, 2014. While this picture of a pristine sky- is clearly in attainment, there are skies all over Oklahoma and the rest of America that look exactly like this. But there are some things we cannot control. We cannot control the summer of 2011, which in Oklahoma was had the highest average maximum temperature during the three summer months of any state since records began in 1895 at 100.4 degrees in 2011. It was also our 3rd driest with 4 inches of rain those 3 months.

We had numerous exceedances of 75 ppm that summer (and the following) because of heat and drought and circumstances that were beyond Oklahoma's control. Despite that beautiful Oklahoma sky on the wall, it may be very difficult for Oklahoma to meet an ozone standard of 65 to 70 ppb. That picture is in a county currently estimated to run between the 65 to 70 ppb average standard.

I want to start with the premise that the most important ingredients to support human life are air, water, and food. Our human bodies can live approximately 3 minutes without air, 3 days without water and 3 weeks without food. While life can extend longer than those limits in many cases, the 3-3-3 generality is a memorable guide. Much has been previously said about economic impact, asthma impact, jobs impact, but I think more should be focused on the biology of human life. God has given us a great wonderful world with abundant air, abundant water and we should be grateful, thankful, and do what we can to protect and sustain those wonderful God given resources. The third most necessary ingredient is food and while many think food just appears in grocery stores it does not.

Providing the safest, most affordable food supply in the world requires a great deal of commerce that causes a great deal of NOx, SOx, and VOCs. Agriculture and forestry, on one hand are among our greatest assets in improving our air quality, in that growing plants consume carbon out of the air. Agriculture grows crops that consume carbon, that is then fed to livestock, which is then turned into protein and delivered to your grocery stores. But it does take fertilizer inputs, transportation inputs, diesel fuel inputs, food processing inputs, food shipment inputs and until finally it is there on the plates of Americans supplying that third most necessary ingredient to sustain human life.

This proposed standard means greater costs to our producers and for smaller operators who operate on a very thin margin that is already impacted by unpredictable forces such as Mother Nature; those increased costs can result in the decision to quit farming. Having to retrofit a combine, or tractor or generator is expensive and for a farmer who never knows for sure what price they will receive for their commodity, it is challenging to take on more expense to work towards a standard that may be unattainable.

Years ago, some Yale researchers suggested returning the Great Plains into the Buffalo Commons. That is all fine and good, but what are we going to do with people, and how are we going to feed them. American Agriculture has never been more efficient, but it must continue to grow more efficient if it is going to continue to feed a growing world. It is estimated agriculture may have to double its current food supply by 2050. And again to remind you, Food is not an option.

Food is a necessity for survival but it is also a necessity for the stability of a nation. When you look across the world and find countries with food insecurity you also find a lack of stability in the government and the security of the nation and many times you find war and unrest. When people are working to find a way to feed their children every day, they have no time to focus on other aspects of the community or economy. Increased regulations that impact farmers and ranchers daily operations have a direct impact on food availability and the cost of food to consumers. The United States is very blessed to have had food security for its entire existence.

In the previous hearing much was said about the prevalence of asthma and its sensitivity to ozone. I am not a scientist or a doctor, but in Oklahoma we have another invasive nuisance in Oklahoma that I would point out is another major health risk and that is eastern redcedar. Eastern redcedar is an invasive species gobbling up thousands of acres a year in Oklahoma. It's pollen causes itchy eyes, runny noses, congestion, migraines and more. I am not comparing the two in severity, but the solution to the health problems associated with redcedar according to every conservation and environmental group I know is effective land management which includes prescribed burning. Prescribed burn that would be prevented if Oklahoma counties are in a non-attainment status. Now I would not suggest we rate health concerns as the one that affects your loved ones is the one you are most likely to care about, but many times a solution to one health concern aggravates another, and when does government finally decide it can't know all of the answers. Our responsibility is to do the best with this earth that we can. Evidence shows that our Ozone levels are moving in the right direction and approaching background levels.

Oklahoma is one of the most diverse states in the U.S. both geographically and ecologically with more eco-regions per square mile than any other state. We have a large amount of grasslands and forests. Prescribed burning is a technique that prevents wildfires, manages smoke contributions to the atmosphere, saves lives and property, and improves grassland and forest health. All these things are beneficial for the health of the environment, economy, and human health. Being in non-attainment because of this EPA proposed rule can prohibit these beneficial aspects of prescribed fire.

Working together these past 20 years has resulted in lower ozone levels. I am thankful for the efforts EPA and Americans have invested in protecting and improving our precious air and water resources.

However, at some point we have to stop and consider competing interests in protecting human health, in protecting natural resources and in protecting our food supply and our economy that are equally important.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony on this very important issue.