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IFB members testify at EPA RFS hearing in Michigan

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FarmWeek

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) held a public hearing Wednesday regarding the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) program. Specifically, the hearing was created to allow individuals to comment on the supplemental notice of proposed rulemaking for the RFS program.

Five individuals representing Illinois Farm Bureau and one representing Illinois Corn Growers Association testified at the hearing in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Throughout the nearly five-hour hearing, more than 70 individuals testified.

Four of the IFB attendees testified about the impacts excessive small refinery exemptions (SRE) have had on their family farms and rural communities.

“We’re living with the financial impact of this failed waiver policy every single day,” stated Brian Duncan, IFB vice president. “Demand destruction has indeed occurred.”

 “EPA actions that curtail current and possible future ethanol production lower corn demand, lower corn prices and hurt the ag economy for all farmers, especially young producers just getting started,” said Steve Turner, Cass County Farm Bureau member.

Megan Dwyer, Illinois Corn Growers Association nutrient loss reduction manager, testified about the importance of ethanol to her as a mom and farmer. “… Ethanol is endorsed by the American Lung Association … is not only better for the environment but for my checkbook.”

Gracelynn Dale, IFB State Young Leader Committee from District 4, along with Dennis Green, IFB Board District 13 director, Duncan, Turner and Dwyer testified on the negative impact excessive SREs have had on their local ethanol plants.

 Organizations that testified ranged from national and state agricultural and biofuel groups, American Petroleum Institute, Archer Daniels Midland and the Coalition for Renewable Natural Gas.

Pro-biofuel groups shared a message of frustration because of EPA’s failure to uphold the law. Kent Engelbrecht, ADM biodiesel trade manager and chairman of the National Biodiesel Board, noted that EPA has historically never followed the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) recommendations, suggesting that they are unlikely to follow DOE’s recommendations moving forward.

Anti-biofuel groups expressed opposition to any increases in biofuel production or reallocation of lost SREs. Tim Timmons, Boilermakers Local 85 business manager, testified that jobs are at stake and costs will increase for companies that have to purchase more Renewable Identification Numbers.

A few individuals shared EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler’s comments in a September hearing. “Ethanol demand has not been impacted by the small refinery program,” Wheeler said. “In fact, we’ve seen an uptick in ethanol over the last two years.”

The 30-day public comment period on these issues is open until Nov. 29. After accounting for comments, EPA plans to finalize these rules by the end of the year.

Comments may be submitted through the federal docket at {bit.ly/RenewableFuelStandards}.

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