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## Ag World Cautiously Optimistic on Perdue Pick

January 27, 2017

On the eve of his inauguration, President Trump announced Sonny Perdue of Georgia as nominee for Secretary of Agriculture. Perdue (no relation to Perdue chicken), was a Georgia state Senator and then later Governor of Georgia from 2003 to 2011. He holds a doctorate in veterinary medicine and now owns a private food and product export business along with his cousin, Senator David Perdue (R, GA).

USDA is the largest and most wide-ranging federal agency – responsible for everything from the school lunch and food stamp programs to crop insurance, conservation programs and research, as well as the U.S. Forest Service. The Secretary pick is especially important this year, as lawmakers hope to complete Farm Bill negotiations before the bill expires in September of 2018. In Farm Bill negotiations, regional, more so than political differences, shape the debate.

After having waited on tenterhooks for the administration's pick, lawmakers and agriculture interests were mostly cautiously optimistic on the choice. It's a seismic shift to have a Secretary hailing from outside the Midwest; the past three Secretaries have been from that region. In the Midwest, corn and soy are king, whereas in Perdue's home state of Georgia, it's peanuts and cotton. John Hansen, of the Nebraska Farmers Union stated, "He's going to come with a more Southern crops perspective ... There are very significant regional differences and perspectives."

Unlike Rex Tillerson (State) or Scott Pruitt (EPA), Perdue's record on various issues related to the mission of USDA is more mixed, which is why many are reserving judgment until his nomination hearings get underway. While Perdue's comments on climate as well as campaign contributions from chicken processors, beverage and fertilizer companies will certainly draw attention, he also instituted a number of positive changes on energy efficiency, renewable energy and renewable fuels as Governor.

### Perdue's Record on Climate Change & Environment

While Governor of Georgia, Perdue made little mention of climate change. More recently, he has made comments that reveal a skepticism of climate change. In a 2014 opinion article he wrote, "Climate change, we're told, is responsible for heavy rains and drought alike. Whether temperatures are unseasonably low or high, global warming is the culprit. Snowstorms, hurricanes, and tornadoes have been around since the beginning of time, but now they want us to accept all of it is the result of climate change."



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As Governor, Perdue was widely derided for holding a prayer session in front of the state Capitol during a severe drought. However, there may be a small opening to press him on climate -- his office released the State Energy Strategy For Georgia in 2005. It lists man-made climate change as a top threat to the Georgia and states, "Climate change could affect the economy through rising shoreline levels and resulting damage to coastal development, disruption of growing seasons for agriculture and forestry, and reduced tourist trade."

The instances of climate denial are likely to receive a lot of attention during his nomination hearing, and it will be interesting to see if he softens to a more "lukewarmist" position, as did both Pruitt and Perry (DOE), during their respective hearings.

### **Perdue's Record on Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency**

Perdue appears to be fairly solid on biofuels, energy conservation, and renewable energy. Georgia is a leader in renewable biomass use -- mostly wood waste from the state's forest industry, as well as solar and clean energy R&D.

During his tenure as Governor of Georgia, he directed the state government to reduce energy use by 15 percent by 2020 relative to 2007, through a combination of energy efficiency and renewable energy, commenting that "meeting the 15 percent reduction goal will lessen Georgia's dependence on traditional energy sources, support the economy, and improve the environment ... Undertaking this challenge to conserve energy will help ensure that Georgia's natural resources are protected for future generations to use and to enjoy."

While Governor, he made additional pro-environmental protection statements, such as, "Relying on efficiency, conservation, renewable energy and advanced clean technologies, Georgia can meet its energy needs in an environmentally responsible and economic way."

Governor Perdue also created the Georgia Energy Innovation Center (EIC), an energy R&D and business development hub that works on renewable energies, storage, and energy efficiency. When the EIC was created, Governor Perdue stated, "The state of Georgia is quickly becoming a recognized leader in alternative energy and fuel ... Our goal is to develop a bioenergy industry that provides substantial economic benefit to Georgia and produces 15 percent of the state's transportation fuels by 2020 from locally produced biofuels."

### **Initial Reactions Boil Down to Regional Priorities**

Mostly, industry and interest groups reactions boiled down to regional priorities. Given the political football that the Renewable Fuel Standard has become, many Midwesterners were cautious in their assessment of Perdue. Monte Shaw, Executive Director of the Iowa Renewable Fuel Association stated, "there is concern in the Midwest that no cabinet pick has a demonstrably pro-RFS track record and that there is no Midwestern representation in the cabinet."



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In a statement, Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA), stated, “The Secretary of Agriculture oversees a broad swath of very important American policy that helps feed and fuel the world ... Understanding and having an appreciation of the institution of the family farm like we have in Iowa and the Midwest, which is the strength of American agriculture, is important.”

In addition to the Farm Bill, Perdue will face a host of wide-ranging hot-button issues, from the reauthorization of the school lunch program and the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) rule, as well as debates over immigration policy, foreign trade, and water quality.

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Richard P. Vlosky, Ph.D.  
*Director, Louisiana Forest Products Development Center*  
*Crosby Land & Resources Endowed Professor of Forest Sector Business Development*  
Room 227, School of Renewable Natural Resources  
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
Phone (office): (225) 578-4527; Fax: (225) 578-4251; Mobile Phone: (225) 223-1931  
Web Site: [www.LFPDC.lsu.edu](http://www.LFPDC.lsu.edu)



**President, Forest Products Society; President-Elect, WoodEMA i.a.**

