



U.S.

Next Phase of Obama's Executive Push: Climate Hubs

By CORAL DAVENPORT FEB. 5, 2014

WASHINGTON — On the heels of the Senate's passage of a long-awaited farm bill, the Obama administration is to announce on Wednesday the creation of seven regional "climate hubs" aimed at helping farmers and rural communities respond to the risks of climate change, including drought, invasive pests, fires and floods.

White House officials describe the move as one of several executive actions that President Obama will take on climate change without action from Congress.

In substance, the creation of the climate hubs is a limited step, but it is part of a broader campaign by the administration to advance climate policy wherever possible with executive authority. The action is also part of a push to build political support for the administration's more divisive moves on climate change - in particular, the Environmental Protection Agency's regulations on coal-fired power plants.

Tom Vilsack, the secretary of agriculture and a former Iowa governor, is to announce the creation of the climate hubs at a White House briefing.

"For generations, America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners have innovated and adapted to challenges," Mr. Vilsack is to say, according to prepared remarks. "Today, they face a new and more complex threat in the form of a changing and shifting climate, which

impacts both our nation's forests and our farmers' bottom lines.”

The hubs will be located in Ames, Iowa; Durham, N.H.; Raleigh, N.C.; Fort Collins, Colo.; El Reno, Okla.; Corvallis, Ore.; Las Cruces, N.M.; and Davis, Calif.

Although rural communities in Republican congressional districts often have a negative view of the E.P.A., which regulates agricultural activities, such as the use of pesticides and water on farms. But farmers are also on the front lines of extreme weather, particularly increased drought, which scientists say is linked to climate change.

The farm belt suffered deeply during the record drought of 2012, and the government estimates that the American economy lost \$50 billion due to drought from 2011 to 2013, much of that from the agricultural sector.

With programs like the climate hubs, the Obama administration hopes to help farmers adapt to climate change while making the case for broader climate regulations.

The E.P.A. is now drafting regulations that will limit carbon pollution from coal-fired power plants and potentially shutter hundreds of them around the country. The administration anticipates objections from the coal industry and many states when the rule is completed.

Nebraska is already suing the administration over a draft E.P.A. climate change regulation issued in September, which would cut carbon pollution from future coal-fired power plants.