

# Global Warming, Anyone?

—Ulf Kintzel

*Photos by Author*

Yes, indeed, I dare touching this subject, which has become a political football like few other topics have. Everyone seems to have an opinion about this topic, so why shouldn't I? On one side of the issue you have the political left, who will tell you each time we have a warmer than average day but still a normal weather event, that this is the result of global warming. Each time we have a hurricane, a drought, a flood, or a wildfire they will blame man-made climate change even if it doesn't make any sense at all, often conflating weather and climate and attributing normal variations in weather occurrences to global warming. They cry doomsday every time, and as a result fewer and fewer people are willing to listen since doomsday hasn't come. You probably know the story of the boy who cried wolf. It makes the proponents of this side of the issue an easy target to be ridiculed regardless of whether they are right or wrong.

On the other hand you have the political right. Many on that side are denying the existence of global warming, especially a man-made one. Every time we have snow in Texas or somewhere else in the Deep South they point to it as proof that climate change is a hoax, being equally guilty of conflating weather with climate.

In the political arena, a compromise on this issue seems impossible due to a complete lack of common ground.

The main culprit among the greenhouse gases said to be responsible for global warming or climate change is carbon dioxide or CO<sub>2</sub>, most notably emitted when burning

fossil fuels like oil (as in gasoline) or coal (as in generating electricity). Many industrialized nations made several attempts to try to curb emission of greenhouse gases like CO<sub>2</sub>. The Kyoto protocol is perhaps the most well-known attempt to do so.

However, it so happens that rising nations that grow out of poverty use fossil fuels to do so. Today it is countries like China and India, tomorrow it will be a different nation, and the day after tomorrow yet another. As these nations grow out of poverty, they also become more stable and often become democracies or at least more open societies. Should we, who already have our personal freedoms, all that we can eat, and have far more than just a roof over our heads, deny these countries their rise to prosperity? Can we deny a person somewhere in the world who wants more than just a bowl of rice per day that desire for the sake of reducing the output of greenhouse gases? We shouldn't and we won't. And when it comes to greenhouse gas reduction, you won't find an open ear in these developing countries anyway. The environment is not (yet) high on their agenda. Besides, political instability is an even greater threat to humans throughout the world, and the rise of democracies is far more likely to allow humans to live their lives with dignity and make the world a better and a more peaceful place. I grew up in communism, and when it comes to democracy I'd say it still is the best place to be, despite of all its shortcomings and flaws. Or do any of you wish to move to North Korea?

So if the rise in greenhouse gases is inevitable and if that indeed fuels climate change, where does that leave us? Where



is perhaps common ground?

In the immediate aftermath of superstorm “Sandy,” New York governor Cuomo took a position that I have claimed for myself for many years: He talked about the fact that extreme weather events occur more often and that we have to think about means to deal with them. In essence, he suggested that we have to adapt and have to mitigate. As far as I know, he avoided the words “global warming” and “climate change” altogether and only talked about solutions as to how to deal with future floods and storms. My point exactly for quite some time: adapt.

The facts are the facts: Ever since we started recording weather patterns, we haven’t had weather extremes like this with such frequency, be it droughts, storms, floods, or record temperatures. If you don’t like facts, talk to an old-timer. Ask him or her if the weather now is the same as it was when they were young. Granted, memory is a tricky thing, but I haven’t found a single one who thinks the weather hasn’t changed. Sure, it could be just that, a difference in weather pattern. I don’t want to make the same mistake and conflate weather with climate. But when it goes on for so long, climate change becomes the more probable answer.

Meanwhile, the climate conference in Doha took place and there, too, was more talk about adaptation and mitigation than just talking about reduction of greenhouse gases. More and more leading experts speak up against these climate conferences with mostly symbolic character and ask for solutions in dealing with climate change instead. That all sounds much wiser and much more practical and doable to me. In fact, it doesn’t need one grand solution. There are many solutions, big and small, many of which can be addressed locally or regionally.

Let’s look at some of the big issues associated with climate change that make it into the press quite regularly. It is alleged that about 400 polar bears, give or take, die each year because of the arctic ice melting. It surely sounds dramatic. However, did you know that this many and more polar bears get killed each year because they are hunted and poached in countries like Canada and Russia? I heard this for the first time from the late British author Christopher Hitchens, no stranger to controversy. I was convinced that this was a right-wing talking point without substance. Turns out he was right. Do we put the same effort into stopping or at least reducing

the hunt? No, it barely makes the news. It just isn’t as dramatic.

Let’s look at another example. Countries like India are said to be particularly hard-hit by climate change due to even hotter temperatures and less water. Did you know that according to the **Food and Agriculture Organization**, in developing countries like India about 40 percent of all food is lost due to deficient collection, lack of refrigeration, spotty infrastructure, and lack of logistics and warehousing? And do you know that about 40 percent of our food in developed countries like the USA and countries in Europe is being wasted, meaning perfectly good food is being thrown away? Do we discuss this in the daily news? Not really.

Did you know that 27 percent of the Netherlands, one of the most densely populated countries on the earth, lies up to 23 feet below sea level. They are protected by a whole system of man-made dikes, dams, and floodgates. And with our economic might we can’t build some seawalls to keep Manhattan from flooding?

Can we address solutions to these issues with the same energy with which we fight pseudo-philosophical arguments over climate change? Perhaps it would yield greater results, or at least some results.

What is true on the large scale is true on a smaller scale. Each of us farmers can do our part to adapt to climate change. Here is a simple example: Many farmers plow up their fields in the fall, leaving the bare soil exposed. Water and soil erosion takes place. The farmer loses topsoil and with it nutrients. On top of it, he or she will lose soil moisture when spring comes around. Bare soil heats up and dries out much faster than soil with some sort of residue or residual like a cover crop would supply. I know that is often belittled by conventional farmers as some “green” idea of those organic freaks, but the science is in on this, folks. This is no hippie idea. It is a method as conservative as it is green. What is true for a farmer in the immediate neighborhood of mine is certainly true for big parts of the Midwest where runoff from bare fields eventually ends up in the Gulf of Mexico, creating a dead zone due to all the nutrients washed into it via the Mississippi River.

The list of dealing with warmer or more extreme weather goes on: no-till drilling, leaving more residual when grazing, heat and/or drought tolerant varieties of crops, fruits, and vegetables, and more. And we haven’t even put our collective minds to this issue. Look at the  
mighty and amazing



things humans invented and built. Who is to say we can't invent and organize things to deal with climate change?

Personally, I have already started the process of adaptation. I have tweaked my own business model in order to deal with the summer droughts that may become more frequent. I moved more and more lambing into the winter and very early spring months. The weather is not as unfavorable anymore to do so and may continue that way. In return, I maximize the use of spring moisture, which still seems to come reliably. That means I will have finished and sold off most of my market lambs when summer comes around and drier weather sets in. Now I have mostly ewes to feed that can always maintain themselves on lesser quality grass and some first-cutting hay. Finishing lambs, on the other hand, requires top quality pasture or forage. In essence, we all can—some more, some less—adapt in our own way to climate change. It doesn't need politicians to finally come around; let's stop the bickering and seek solutions.

There is one more point I want to make. Climate never has been static. Throughout human history, climate has been at times warmer (i.e. during the Medieval Warm Period from about the year 1000 to about 1300, when Greenland was indeed green) and at times colder (i.e. during the "Little Ice Age" from about 1550 to about 1850, when heavy snow and frost almost jeopardized the first American settlement in North America in Jamestown, Virginia, in the early 1600s). I have read that the relative prosperity during the warmer

period and war and famine during the colder period were at least in part caused by the climate. That would make perfect sense to me.

We see that nature adapted to both warmer and colder climates, and that doomsday didn't happen.

I am not trying to paint a rosy picture. There will be winners and losers as climate change progresses. In some areas, people will suffer. However, climate change is inevitable. Climate change is not a left versus right issue. It is not a progressive versus conservative issue. In my view, it is a smart versus ignorant issue. Let's reduce losses, pain, and suffering by being prepared rather than being argumentative. There is common ground to do just that.

Where do I come down on this issue? Do I think climate change is man-made? Well, I won't tell you. I don't want to distract from the point I am trying to make: to adapt. So whether I am a liberal or a conservative matters not. What matters is that I want to be on the smart side and not on the ignorant one. Besides, I am busy adapting already to the changes, man-made or not, that are coming. You can join me and the many others—governments, companies, and individuals alike that have already started the process of adaptation—or you can keep arguing. The choice is yours. 🐾

*Ulf Kintzel is a native of Germany and lives in the U.S. since 1995. In 2006 he moved from New Jersey to Rushville in the Finger Lakes area in upstate New York. Ulf owns and operates White Clover Sheep Farm. He breeds and raises grass-fed White Dorper sheep without any grain feeding. His website address is [www.whitecloversheepfarm.com](http://www.whitecloversheepfarm.com). He can be reached by e-mail at [ulf@whitecloversheepfarm.com](mailto:ulf@whitecloversheepfarm.com) or by phone at 585-554-3313.*

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