

Mega-dairy wins approval

7,000-plus cows for Rahilly Road operation

By Carol Reiter, Merced Sun-Star

Last Updated: March 31, 2004, 06:39:05 AM PST

Finally.

That was the word silently mouthed by Simon Vander Woude's lawyer Tuesday morning after Vander Woude's dairy was approved -- again -- by the Merced County Board of Supervisors.

In 1999, Vander Woude started the process to open a 7,000-plus cow dairy near Rahilly Road and South Highway 59 in Merced. Although the Merced County Planning Commission approved the permit to build the dairy, the county instituted new animal confinement operation rules before construction could start.

After the new rules took effect, Vander Woude started the permitting process again, and ordered an environmental impact review which, along with an application for a new dairy permit, was approved by the planning commission earlier this year.

Everything seemed smooth as milk.

But when the plan came before the supervisors, environmental groups -- including the San Joaquin Valley Raptor Rescue Center, Protect Our Water, Central Valley Safe Environment Network, and Communities for Land, Air and Water -- tossed up some roadblocks.

Citing numerous violations of the California Environmental Quality Act and other problems, the groups asked the supervisors to reject the EIR and not approve the dairy permit. The appellants gave the board and the planning commission new information to review at the March 9 county board meeting.

County Planner Bob King has since answered all the questions brought up by both the appellants and the Board of Supervisors, and presented his information at Tuesday's board meeting.

"No information that has been supplied by the appellants changes the scope of the EIR, and you should proceed as planned," King told the board.

The only appellants' concern that could not be mitigated was air quality, King said.

He said the appellants seem to feel the county has given up on improving air quality. The problem isn't with the dairy, specifically, but with the quality of the San Joaquin Valley's air, he said.

"Our county has imposed mitigation with vigorous standards for dairy operations," King said. The Vander Woude dairy will use biogas recovery as a way to meet air-quality performance standards.

Biogas recovery is a method of trapping methane given off by decomposing manure. Trapped methane can later be used to produce electricity.

King also addressed water quality and noise. The dairy will not release any water off its property, and the amount of water used will actually be less than is now used for crops grown on the land, King said.

Noise and transportation issues have all been mitigated, King said, including money the Vander Woude family will give the county for road maintenance.

King said on average, six trucks would travel to the dairy each day.

District 5 Supervisor Jerry O'Banion moved to approve the EIR and the permit, thanking the Vander Woude family for meeting the regulations.

"The intent of our animal confinement ordinance was so people wouldn't have to go through this. This family decided to go with additional EIRs and they will contribute greatly to Merced County," O'Banion said.

The other supervisors also praised the Vander Woudes for their persistence and willingness to comply.

Teleconference meeting today to discuss emissions rules

News Brief, The Bakersfield Californian

March 31, 2004

Members of the public can comment on proposed emissions rules during a meeting today, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The 6:30 p.m. meeting in Fresno will be teleconferenced to the Bakersfield office at 2700 M St. in Suite 275, organizers said.

The drafted rule would encourage developers to strategically locate and design for new malls, housing developments and other building projects that generate new trips for motorists.

Failure to reduce emissions to a certain level could result in mitigation fees, according to the proposed rules.

Air District seeks community input on school bus cleanup rule

The Taft Midway Driller

By Matt Henry, Midway Driller Staff Writer

Tuesday, March 30, 2004

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is soliciting public comment on a proposed rule to reduce emissions from diesel school buses.

Public workshops on the draft rule will be at the three District offices at 1:30 p.m. on April 27 and 28 and at 10:30 a.m. on April 29. The offices are located at 1990 E. Gettysburg in Fresno, 2700 M St., Suite 275 in Bakersfield and at 4230 Kiernan Ave., Suite 130 in Modesto.

Rule 9310 (School Bus Fleets) would apply to school bus fleets that transport K-12 students in both public and private schools. This includes the 10 school buses in the Taft City School District.

"This new rule would reduce school children's exposure to toxic air pollutants," said Scott Nester, a planning manager for the Air District.

A study released in Oct. 2003 by the California Air Resources Board (ARB) showed that children riding diesel school buses are exposed to unhealthy levels of diesel exhaust on their way to and from school.

Diesel exhaust is known to contain significant amounts of toxic air contaminants.

The report estimated that riding a school bus for 13 years could increase a child's lifetime cancer risk by about 4 percent, and could increase respiratory symptoms by 6 percent.

"The goals of this new rule are to help reduce school children's and the public's exposure to diesel particulate matter and to reduce the NOx emissions that create ozone," Nester said.

Oxides of nitrogen, or NOx, reductions are needed as the San Joaquin Valley moves to the "extreme" non-attainment classification for the federal one-hour ozone standard.

Because the Air District is prohibited from setting tailpipe standards for "mobile sources," Rule 9310 would instead require school districts and other school bus operators to ensure their in-use fleets meet current state and federal tailpipe standards by 2015, and purchase only state-of-the-art school buses after Jan. 1, 2005.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District in Southern California and the ARB have adopted similar regulations for other types of fleets, including garbage trucks and transit buses. Mobile sources include cars, trucks and other vehicles, and are the Valley's largest source of smog-forming emissions.

"We will work with the schools, state and local agencies, and the state legislature to develop funding resources for this program," Nester said, adding that fees collected from other air pollution rules might be a source of funding.

"It sounds good that the state wants to kick some money in," said Don Maxwell, director of maintenance, operations and transportation for the Taft City School District. "It comes down to money."

Right now it is cheaper to retrofit an older bus than replace it. A new bus would cost \$125,000.

According to a recent survey, more than 2,700 school buses logged more than 38 million miles in the San Joaquin Valley in 2002.

Older school buses generally emit more pollutants than newer models, and more than half of the Valley's diesel school buses will be at least 15 years old by the time this new rule would take effect.

Cleaning up these older buses would provide the largest part of the total benefit from the rule. New diesel engine technology, coupled with new low-sulfur diesel fuel and exhaust controls, can achieve 85 percent lower particulate-matter emissions, and 75 percent lower NOx emissions, compared to older buses.

Gasoline engines and engines fueled with compressed natural gas (CNG) emit fewer pollutants than diesel engines and would not be subject to the change-out provisions of Rule 9310.

Nineteen school districts in the San Joaquin Valley have already switched some of their bus fleets to CNG; the Valley currently has 174 CNG school buses on the road.

In the last five years, the Air District has provided grants to school districts totaling \$2.8 million for CNG buses and fueling facilities, and approximately \$1 million for installation of particulate control devices on 148 diesel school buses.

[Fresno Bee editorial, March 30, 2004:](#)

New rule for schools

Children get an extra helping of bad air riding older school buses.

It's hardly news that school buses can be a major source of air pollution to people who get stuck behind them in traffic.

What those drivers -- and parents -- may not know is this: A recent report from the state air board estimated that riding a school bus for 13 years could make children 4% more likely to get cancer over their lifetimes, and increase the number of children with symptoms of respiratory illnesses by 6%.

A small start has already been made on cleaning up school buses, but more is needed. That's why the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is beginning the process of writing a new rule to govern emissions from diesel-powered school buses. Public comments are being taken in advance of workshops set for April.

Some more numbers:

- * Valley districts used 2,700 buses and drove them more than 38 million miles in 2002. Older buses are the worst offenders, and by the time this new rule is adopted, about half those Valley buses will be more than 15 years old.

- * Alternative fuel buses won't be affected by the new rule, but they number fewer than 200 right now.

- * In the last five years, the Valley air district has spent nearly \$4 million on new buses, fueling stations and emission-control devices for school buses.

Much more will be needed, and as always, funding is a problem. One source already in use is money collected in fees and fines paid by other polluters.

Those who wish to participate in the rule-making process may call the air district at (559) 230-6000 for more information.

This is not trivial. Diesel exhaust is unhealthy for everyone, and children who ride in older school buses appear to be getting an extra dose of it.

[Letter to the Bakersfield California, March 31, 2004](#)

Cooperate, compromise

The Bakersfield City Council is responsible for the welfare of the citizens of Bakersfield. It is a shame that the Sierra Club had to remind them of that with their lawsuits regarding air pollution. But at least the City Council has "seen the light" and is promoting zero pollution with the new housing developments. It has been a long time coming. Let's hope it is a trend that will continue in that direction.

Let's also hope that members of the Kern County Board of Supervisors are taking notice.

Somehow the old saying, "speak softly and carry a big stick," comes to mind when thinking about the Sierra Club and its recent actions of promoting clean air here in Bakersfield.

Cooperation and compromise does seem to be the best solution to most of our local problems.

-- KENNETH M. CANNON, Bakersfield

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, March 30, 2004:](#)

Students may find better air quality in school classrooms

Jeannette B. Forbes, Teacher, Fresno High School

(Updated Tuesday, March 30, 2004, 6:24 AM)

Carrie Zulewski's letter March 17 implies that the Fresno Unified School District does not keep the health interests of students in mind when setting the starting date for the academic school year.

She asserts that beginning school when air quality has improved is better for children with asthma. While on the surface this appears to be a flawless position, I respectfully disagree.

A large number of our lower socioeconomic students do not have access to air conditioning at home, while they do in our district classrooms. On bad air days, they are required to stay indoors, safer from harmful air, something that may not be possible when home on vacation.

When the air is unhealthy, Fresno Unified has had a long-standing policy of restricting outdoor activities, including sports practices and recesses. The school district aggressively monitors air quality.

For these reasons, it is often the case that a child who has asthma may actually be safer at school than at home on vacation.