

Wood-grinding machinery popular

Tougher air quality rules in Valley renew farmers' interest.

By Dennis Pollock

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Some of the companies at the World Ag Expo in Tulare are getting a boost from concerns about air quality in the central San Joaquin Valley.

They range from vendors of chippers in the \$7,000 range to makers of \$500,000 mega-grinders.

Although some of the companies have been selling grinders and chippers to farmers for almost half a century, recent legislation is pushing more growers to turn away from burning pruned branches, pushed-out trees or vines in the field.

"You don't fix anything until it's broken," said Jim Heinrichs with W.J. Heinrichs Inc. in Reedley. "It used to be that burning was the easiest way to dispose of it. Buck it and burn it."

That was before California legislation such as Senate Bill 700, which repealed the agriculture industry's exemption from air-operating permits, and four other laws that will phase out open-field agricultural burning and create incentives for biomass plants to take agriculture waste. Those controls will be the topic of a panel discussion at 11:30 a.m. today at the farm show featuring Steve Worthley, a member of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District; Manuel Cunha Jr., president of the Nisei Farmers League in Fresno; Jason Baldwin, executive director of the Madera County Farm Bureau; Dave Crow, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District; and Roger Isom, vice president of California Cotton Growers and Ginners Associations in Fresno.

The discussion will be at Median and S streets on the expo grounds.

Heinrichs said that some California growers have been shredding or grinding wood in their orchards for decades. His father, who founded the business in 1946, first brought in machines that had been used in the Midwest to cut corn stubble and modified them to cut grapevine canes.

Heinrichs said the Reedley company has developed a prototype for a machine that will be used in almond orchards to shred prunings to "a toothpick consistency. Chips aren't good. Nut machines think it's a nut."

Stephen Heinrichs, sales representative for Jackrabbit of Ripon, expects to sell between eight and 10 chipper-shredder machines priced at \$250,000 each this year.

"A lot of growers are saying, 'I want to get ahead of the curve,' " he said.

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Governor will visit Ag Expo

By James C. Loughrie
(Hanford) Sentinel Reporter

TULARE - Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is expected to visit World Ag Expo in Tulare Wednesday, making it the first time the recently elected governor has visited the Central Valley with the exception of events in Fresno and Bakersfield.

Ag Expo Chairwoman Margaret Uchita received confirmation from the governor's office Sunday. Schwarzenegger is expected to fly in by helicopter, but Uchita is unsure of the hours he will attend. The governor's media office would not confirm if he was expected to attend, stating that they do not release scheduling information more than 24 hours in advance.

Schwarzenegger would be the first California governor to visit the World Ag Expo since Jerry Brown, Uchita said. Former Gov. Gray Davis, who was recalled in October, visited the grounds for a bill signing ceremony, but did not visit the Expo, she said.

The annual World Ag Expo began Monday with a kick-off conference that included debates and discussion on agriculture issues including water quality, agriculture advocacy and a seminar on women in agriculture. Monday also included a lunchtime address by A.G. Kawamura, secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

World Ag Expo opens to the public today for its annual three-day run at the International Agri-Center Complex in Tulare. More than 1,500 exhibitors are expected at this year's show, which will offer daily workshops on farm issues such as [air quality](#), waste water, worker's compensation and more.

One of the biggest agriculture events in the world, Ag Expo also showcases the latest farm equipment, including tractors, pruning machinery and environmental accessories. In addition, World Ag Expo is home to a special dairy exhibit that holds the latest in dairy technology advances. Uchita, who farms specialty crops only a few miles away from the site, said Ag Expo organizers try to find new ways to approach agriculture each year to avoid the event becoming stagnant. This year is Uchita's first serving as the chair after several years of involvement with Ag Expo. Her husband, Bob, served as chair in 1986.

"We've always tried to promote agriculture to the area and to showcase the new innovations in the industry," she said.

Admission price to World Ag Expo is \$7 per person and \$18 for a three-day pass.

Ripon power project switched on

By Tim Moran
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The Modesto Bee

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The Modesto Irrigation District's Ripon power plant project and the bonds to finance it got a green light from the MID board Tuesday.

The 95-megawatt plant would be built on 12.25 acres at South Stockton Avenue and Doak Boulevard.

A megawatt is enough electricity to power 300 homes in Modesto in the summer and 1,000 homes in the winter. Ninety-five megawatts would power 28,500 and 95,000 homes, respectively. The Ripon plant will provide "peaking" power for the entire district when power demand is at its highest.

MID officials said the plant is needed to serve growth in Ripon and Salida, as well as the new town of Mountain House, near Tracy. The district also serves most of Modesto and portions of Riverbank, Oakdale and Escalon.

The natural gas-fired power plant will cost \$76.5 million, financed with revenue bonds issued by the district.

The plant financing will be part of a bond issue of up to \$125 million; the bond package, approved Tuesday, includes money for upgrades to the existing McClure power plant in Modesto; expansion of the Rosemore substation and the Westley switching station; and construction of transmission and distribution lines.

The power plant approval came on a 4-0 vote, with board member Cecil Hensley abstaining because he said he had not seen bid details on equipment for the plant.

The bid details would be made available to board members later Tuesday, said Steve Hill, project manager.

The bond package won unanimous approval from the board, although Hensley noted that the district's debt level would rise to almost \$900 million with the new bonds.

The bond issue total is likely to be closer to \$116 million, depending on bond market interest rates, said Robert DeLaCruz, MID's treasurer.

The power plant project, approved last week by the California Energy Commission, still needs permits from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the city of Ripon.

The MID hopes to start construction by October, and commercial operation of the plant a year later.

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