

Fresno saves thousands with solar panels

By John Ellis

[Monday, January 10, Fresno Bee](#)

Solar panels installed over the summer at Fresno's Municipal Service Center at El Dorado and G streets have won the city recognition from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

More importantly, they will save the city money on its electricity bill and help clean the air because the city is using less power plant-generated electricity.

General Services Director Ken Nerland said before the installation that the average monthly Pacific Gas & Electric Co. bill for the 14-acre yard was \$238,000.

Since the system began operation in July, bills average \$49,000.

"I think we are being very proactive in the clean air arena in the Valley," he said.

After the city submitted information on the project to the EPA, the agency agreed.

It's Green Power Partnership notified the city last week of its recognition.

A plaque was presented to the General Services Department honoring the city as a member of the Green Power Leadership Club, which recognizes entities that make a commitment to generating electricity from renewable energy sources.

The city's 668-kilowatt system was installed on the bus canopy - a football field-sized building - and several other canopies at the service center, where several hundred city employees work. It is one of the largest projects of its kind on the West Coast.

The cost was \$4.1 million, and an additional \$600,000 was spent on energy-efficient retrofitting at City Hall, including the installation of new lighting.

That brought the total cost to \$4.7 million. PG&E is giving the city a \$2.1 million rebate, so net cost to city is \$2.6 million.

Already, Nerland said, the city is saving enough in its energy bills to cover the debt service on the 15-year, low-interest loan through the California Energy Commission.

During the long summer days with plenty of sunshine, the service center will produce more electricity than it needs, rolling its electric usage meter backwards.

Over 25 years, the maintenance yard solar panels and City Hall retrofits are projected to save the city more than \$4 million in energy costs.

The city approved the project in December 2003.

Installation began last spring, and the panels were operational by June, Nerland said.

Housing east of Exeter explored

Grower and builder J.G. Boswell wants to build a community.

By Diwata Fonte

[Saturday, January 8, Fresno Bee](#)

J.G. Boswell Co., the cotton-growing giant that also builds master-planned communities, is turning its attention to Yokohl Valley east of Exeter for a possible development.

"Actively, we've been looking at it for six to eight months," said Bill Ostrem, vice president of Boswell Co., which owns 36,000 acres in Yokohl Valley that is now used as rangeland. "It's been on the radar for years."

Company representatives have been interviewing residents, holding talks and meeting with planning officials in Exeter and Tulare County to float the idea of building a comprehensive retirement community somewhere in the Valley's low-lying land.

"We're trying to understand the market in the Central Valley, what type of community would really make sense in the foothills," Ostrem said.

Boswell representatives met with Delora Buckman-Merritt, chief executive of Exeter's chamber of commerce, a few weeks ago. "They just talked about what our needs are," she said. "We talked about jobs, air quality, water, quality of life. ... Towards the end of our discussion, then they said, 'Let's talk about housing, and what do you think of a development there?'"

The company did not give any details on how large the project would be but mentioned possibilities such as locating schools, a hospital and businesses there, Buckman-Merritt said.

While an "active adult" seniors retirement community would be a likely component, a decision has not been made about what proportion of the community could also be for a traditional community, Ostrem said. Also yet to be decided are what amenities to offer, such as golf courses, health care, tennis courts and parks.

Formal plans could be submitted to the county this year, he said.

Ostrem, who is also president and chief executive of Boswell's subsidiary The EastLake Co., said the Yokohl Valley development would have some similarities to the EastLake development but would offer more natural open space.

EastLake, which opened in 1986, is a master-planned development that spans about 3,200 acres in Chula Vista in San Diego County. When finished, EastLake is expected to offer approximately 8,900 housing units and house a population of about 22,000.

Though known primarily for being one of the largest growers in the nation, Boswell also partnered in the 1960s to build Sun City, a pioneering retirement community.

While the Yokohl Valley project is still in its formative stages, the very possibility is alarming some residents who are concerned over its potential impacts on public safety, water supply, traffic congestion, air quality and economic development in Tulare County.

County officials said they would not want to divert county resources to the project, and Boswell officials said they heard that sentiment often as they talked with residents.

"I don't think this county can spread itself any thinner with fire and police service and ambulance," Buckman-Merritt said.

"I don't feel we have any water to spare," said Leon Ooley, an Exeter City Council member who ran into Boswell representatives on the street.

Ooley concedes that very few details are known about the project, but said that with Friant Dam and irrigation water from the San Joaquin River in question, now is not the time to be considering this kind of development.

Diane Gaynor, a marketing consultant with Roni Hicks & Associates who is working on the project, said Boswell representatives will be making frequent trips to the area to continue their studies.

"We have so much research to do; we are just at the beginning of this," she said.

Air district revved up for more funds

Engine replacement plan effective, district says, but some want to aim higher

By STEPHANIE TAVARES, Californian staff writer
[Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Jan. 9, 2005](#)

Thousands of old, polluting diesel engines across the valley have been replaced over the last decade with the help of an air district incentive program. But some members of the air board think that may not be enough.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's Diesel Engine Replacement Program has provided grants to replace more than 27,000 engines and four "Idle Air" truck stop systems.

It has awarded about \$87 million in grants, which can cover up to 70 percent of funds for a project, since the program began in 1992. District staff estimate the program has cut production of the pollutant nitrogen oxide by about 25,000 tons.

But some air board members say they can do better, especially since the district will soon be getting even more money from taxpayers.

The district this week could not determine how much money is available for new grants but the most recent estimate, presented to the air board in December, was about \$48 million.

District senior air quality manager Todd DeYoung said coming up with an exact number, or even an estimate, is difficult because the amount in the account is constantly fluctuating as projects are approved or canceled.

It's those canceled projects that worry board members.

"We have in the bank more than half of what we spent over an entire 12 years and I'm not satisfied that we are turning this money into cleaner air fast enough," Bakersfield City Councilman and air board member Mike Maggard said.

"We need to find out if there are any areas of that program that are not as user-friendly as they could be," he said.

At the most recent air board meeting, Maggard and other members called for the district to evaluate the program and determine whether there are ways to increase retention.

Maggard said the board should be informed of how well existing programs are running before district staff asks to expand them.

"I don't know if they're as efficient as they could be because they haven't explained how their program has worked," Maggard said.

"There are several underlying reasons why that money hasn't been used and they haven't told us those reasons."

The criticism came amid the recent air board approval of a \$2 increase on the air pollution tax that will bring the fee up to \$7.

The fee, which Maggard voted against, would raise an additional \$4.8 million for the engine replacement program. The tax will also make the district eligible for between \$7 million and \$11 million in state matching funds for the program.

The district is also planning to re-introduce an improved Remove Program, which funded grants for the replacement of polluting engines in smaller vehicles until about two years ago.

Air district staff contend they are doing a fine job of doling out money and working hard to recruit people to participate in the program -- going to agricultural conventions and meeting regularly with corporate farmers, school districts and local government organizations.

"People have been generally receptive of the program," DeYoung said. "We see a large number of applications coming from the agriculture sector. That would be the largest source of applications."

New ag pollution controls criticized

SARAH RUBY, Californian staff writer
[Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Jan. 8, 2005](#)

Long-held fears that new air pollution regulations for agriculture amount to little more than bureaucratic paper pushing have come true, according to farmers and clean air advocates. In the past several weeks, 6,000 farms and dairies submitted plans to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, pledging to control dust from tractors, unpaved roads, loose dirt and other pollution sources.

Known as "conservation management practices plans," they are meant to eliminate 34 tons of dust from the air each day -- 23 percent of their current emissions and 10 percent of the Central Valley's total daily dust pollution.

Dust inhalation has been linked to heart and lung disease, and in some cases, death.

Farmers' groups helped the air district devise the plans, but individual farmers question their impact.

"It's really not going to change a lot (at my farm)," said Glenn Parker, who grows alfalfa and watermelon at Parker Farms in Bakersfield.

Farmers already control their dust, he said, because dust makes it harder for beneficial insects to find their prey.

"We don't want the ground to move," he said. "It hurts us when the ground moves."

The "plans" are several pages of checklists that ask farmers to choose five dust-control strategies.

The list of controls includes applying pesticides through irrigation rather than sprays, combining equipment to reduce the number of vehicle trips in the field, conserving water through drip lines, watering or paving dirt roads, night farming and using Global Positioning Systems to track their movements, among many others.

Environmentalists support these practices, but say farmers won't have to do many of them if they don't already.

For example, one pollution-control option is to stick to a single crop. Doing this avoids less convenient choices such as constructing wind barriers, eliminating burning, leaving land fallow or farming at night.

"It's a joke," said Brent Newell, staff attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, of the air district's program.

He echoed farmers, saying they already do much more for dust control than the program requires.

"There's no net change (in air pollution) as a result of this behavior," Newell said.

He also said there's no way air district staff can consistently check thousands of farms for compliance.

The air district's supporters urge patience. The Central Valley is one of the only places in the country that regulates farms for air pollution, they say, and this program is a good starting point.

"It's going to make a difference," said Kerry Drake, associate director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's regional air division.

The EPA oversees the air district's compliance with the Clean Air Act.

He said air district officials will monitor air quality in the coming months, and if they're not getting the dust reductions they expected, they'll "go back to the drawing board."

The air district is still reviewing the 6,000 plans submitted, but staff is optimistic.

"We think we've done real well," said Rick McVaigh, the district's permit services manager, citing the fact that 6,000 farms out of 6,400 have submitted plans.

Agriculture was the valley's untouchable polluter until pressure by the EPA and legislation from Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, forced the issue.

Florez could not be reached for comment Friday.

Strict rules frustrate farms

Growers calling for common-sense laws

by Tim Moran

[Saturday, Jan. 8, Modesto Bee](#)

Farmers and food processors, the acknowledged economic drivers of the San Joaquin Valley economy, are under the gun to meet a variety of new air and water standards in California.

Everything from dust and ag burning smoke to minerals and salts in waste-water are now subject to stricter regulation.

Growers and processors are struggling to meet the new standards.

Hilmar Cheese Co., the world's largest cheese factory, was recently cited for years of exceeding standards for wastewater discharge from the massive plant.

But President and CEO John Jeter noted that the company has spent \$55 million over the past several years trying to comply with the regulations.

Disposing of wastewater high in sodium and chloride is the problem, Jeter said - and the technology to do it is unproven.

The jury also is still out on whether the system is economically viable, Jeter said. It takes a large amount of electrical power to run, he said, along with the technical know-how to make it work.

"They are facing the same thing dairy farmers are - regulations are changing and it's presumed that the technology is changing to meet the challenges," said Michael Marsh, CEO at Modesto-based Western United Dairyman.

"Technology companies out there say they have invented something in their basement they say can get rid of manure magically. There are vendors out there to take advantage of folks as people seek solutions," he said.

Even if new technology works, farmers don't have the ability to pass along the costs of complying with the regulations, area farm representatives said.

"There's an increased cost of production, but the price of the commodity remains constant," said Ed Perry, interim director of the University of California Cooperative Extension Office in Stanislaus County. "There's a smaller bottom line all the time."

Stanislaus County Agriculture Commissioner Dennis Gudel noted that farmers have been able to adjust so far to the increasing costs of environmental regulation.

"Ag has responded in the past with ingenuity. It has been able to survive because it finds ways to improve, farm more land, use less equipment, more machines, new types and strains of plants, new techniques developed at UC Davis," Gudel said.

But, he warned, "We cannot continue that and think there will never be a cost. By the time people realize it, it may be too late."

Losing ag to other states

Marsh also warned of the danger of losing dairy production to surrounding states if the cost of operating in California gets too high. Dairy is a \$5 billion industry in California, Marsh said, which supports many other jobs.

Allen Dusault, program director of Sustainable Conservation, a San Francisco-based environmental group, sympathizes with the problem.

"There are a couple of things they are right about. Regulations will impose costs on them, and they don't have the ability to pass that along," Dusault said.

"If they spend \$200,000, they have to eat that cost, and that arguably puts their operation at risk," he said.

Dusault's group works with dairy farms to find ways to improve environmental practices while keeping the farm economically viable.

But the costs of compliance probably work against the small farmer and may accelerate the trend toward huge dairy operations, Dusault said.

"The economies of scale will play a significant role. A larger dairy has a greater ability to meet regulatory requirements," he said. "It will accelerate the trend toward megadairies."

It also could accelerate the trend of farmers giving up and selling their land to developers, Desault said.

The time involved to learn about new regulatory requirements and how to comply is a big stumbling block for the small farmer, said Wayne Zipser, Stanislaus County Farm Bureau executive manager.

"It's difficult for them to be educated to understand the technical aspects. They don't have the time. They need to be out in the field, not in the office studying," Zipser said.

Most farmers don't object to regulation, Gudgel said, as long as they understand the reasons for it, and it makes sense.

That's not always the case, however, he said.

New regulations for water-quality monitoring, for instance, are requiring farms to monitor irrigation water coming off fields closely, Gudgel said. But very little irrigation water comes off fields, he said.

Farmer: 'See the big picture'

Farmers are tightly regulated with permits and inspections on pesticide use, but urban consumers use two-thirds of the pesticides sold and are not regulated at all, Gudgel added.

Salida-area beef cattle farmer Jorge Alvarado puts it more bluntly. "Regulators need to see the big picture. Fairy shrimp don't pay taxes or buy tires. Farmers like to see common sense. It's a rare thing."

Alvarado, who is president of the Stanislaus Farm Bureau, has faith in farmers doing the right thing.

"Everyone has a family here, too, they aren't going to hurt themselves or anyone else. We have three or four generations on the same piece of ground. How can you not think they are environmentalists?" he said.

Trying to make a difference

However, there are environmental problems in the valley, Dusault said, and there are ways to improve farming practices to make a difference.

The ag industry has been working hard to resolve them, but problems persist, he said.

Sustainable Conservation favors a market-based approach that offers farmers a financial incentive to make improvements.

Methane digesters that create electricity from animal waste are an example, Dusault said. Reducing permit fees for farms that make improvements is another.

Legislation to add a cent or two on a gallon of milk, with the proceeds earmarked for dairies to improve their operations, is another possibility, Dusault said.

Some of the problem is simply perception, Zipser said. Agriculture hasn't trumpeted the environmental benefits the industry provides, he said.

A single Modesto native ash tree scrubs four tons of ozone from the air in a year, Zipser said.

"We've been remiss in not spending resources to say what 425,000 acres of (orchard) trees scrub out of the air."

Air Agency Alters Smog Regulations

Tougher rules affect 'pollution credit' program that caps amount of two chemicals industries can emit. By 2011, they must cut such emissions even more.

By Miguel Bustillo

[Saturday, Jan. 8, Los Angeles Times](#)

Southern California's regional air quality agency tightened regulations on smokestack industries Friday, changing the rules of a market-based program to reduce smog that critics say has not cut pollution fast enough.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District toughened the requirements of the Regional Clean Air Incentives Market, a program that sets a ceiling on the amount of two key air pollutants that 330 large businesses can emit.

Under the program, known as RECLAIM, businesses that reduce emissions of nitrogen and sulfur oxides below the legal limit receive "pollution credits." They can then sell those credits to businesses that exceed the cap, giving them a financial incentive to clean the air. Businesses that exceed their limits and do not purchase credits face fines.

Since it began a decade ago, the program has reduced the targeted emissions by 50%, according to air agency officials. But progress slowed in recent years after a glut of cheap pollution credits flooded the market - the result of many companies meeting or beating their pollution-reduction goals.

The changes approved Friday by the air agency's governing board raise the goalposts, requiring the businesses to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions an additional 7.7 tons per day by 2011.

The changes also would allow utilities, which were exempted from the program during the state's energy crisis, to reenter the market in 2007. During the crisis, power plants were allowed to greatly exceed their pollution caps to meet power needs.

Air agency officials said Friday's changes should get the program back on track, as well as comply with state law requirements that polluting industries use the best available technology to reduce emissions.

"Cost-effective technologies are available now that can significantly reduce emissions from facilities in the program," said the air district's executive officer, Barry Wallerstein. "We believe the changes meet state law requirements and maintain the integrity of the program, while continuing to move closer to the region's air quality goals."

Industry groups, which had been pushing for a looser cap, did not convince the air district's governing board, but did receive an extra year to make the reductions. Environmentalists said the changes, on the whole, were positive, and should help reduce pollution in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

"The reductions have been very slow in coming" in recent years, said Julie Masters, an attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, which led a coalition of environmental groups that pushed for a tighter cap on emissions. "All in all, we are pleased with the rule and are pleased that they did not give in to industry pressure," Masters added. "But the cap could have been stronger."

Begun in 1993, RECLAIM has been unpopular with environmentalists who argue that the goal of cleaning up the air regionwide won't be met as long as some companies are allowed to pollute -

even if they must pay for the privilege. Environmentalists have also criticized the program as susceptible to mismanagement and fraud.

Last year, one of the architects of the pollution credit market, Anne Sholtz, was arrested by federal authorities, who allege that she defrauded companies of millions of dollars.

Sholtz, who had gone into business as a trader in the market after helping to set it up, was accused by federal prosecutors of running an "\$80-million Ponzi scheme" in which she sold the same pollution credits to several companies. The case is pending.

Official eyes a regional air plan

How the landlocked Bob Hope Airport would or should fit in with such a plan is debatable.

By Mark R. Madler, News-Press and Leader

[Saturday, Jan. 8, in the Los Angeles Times](#)

BURBANK - When the first commercial flight in six years took off from Palmdale late last month, among those present was a county official who saw the occasion as one that could bring a change in air travel to the metro Los Angeles area.

"It was a great sight to see," Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael Antonovich said. "We had clouds and rain in the community but it was pure sunshine with that flight."

If Antonovich had his way, there would be more commercial flights out of Palmdale to relieve the number of flights and prevent expansion at Los Angeles International Airport.

Palmdale, operated by the Los Angeles Board of Airport Commissioners, is primarily used for military aircraft. Palmdale Airport officials suspended commercial flights there in January 1998. The airport has a 9,000-square-foot terminal and 17,000 acres of undeveloped land.

It's that open space around the Palmdale airport that separates it from the Bob Hope Airport, where there is little to no room for expansion. Burbank City Councilman Todd Campbell recognized that open space provides a buffer zone.

"Burbank is landlocked," Campbell said. "That airport will remain a community airport."

Antonovich agreed, saying that in the region-wide picture Bob Hope Airport will continue to provide the type of service it is now due to a lack of building new runways or expanding existing ones.

"In the future, the airport is operating at the capacity it is now," Antonovich said. "There are no restrictions at Ontario and Palmdale."

Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport Authority President Charlie Lombardo casts a skeptical eye on the suggestion of regional airport planning, especially in terms of potentially taking control out of local hands.

And yet, regional planning would be good if it would take pressure off of Bob Hope Airport, Lombardo said.

"We are a nice little regional airport," Lombardo added. "But someone else deciding your future is not a good thing."

Still, Antonovich sees a regional air travel plan as a viable option because the infrastructure around LAX cannot sustain more passengers and expansion would create more gridlock and

pollution.

A 2001 study commissioned by the board of supervisors found that the Antelope Valley could support an airport and when fully operational would generate up to \$65 million in revenues, Antonovich said.

"It makes no sense for someone from the Antelope Valley to go to LAX, just as it makes no sense for someone to go from Inglewood to Palmdale, to catch a plane," Antonovich said.

More Lawsuits Filed Over Hahn's LAX Plan

Three suits now seek to invalidate the City Council's approval of the project and to have a new environmental impact report done.

By Jennifer Oldham

[Friday, Jan. 7, Los Angeles Times](#)

The county of Los Angeles, two cities and a group of residents sued the city of Los Angeles on Thursday over its modernization plan for Los Angeles International Airport, claiming its voluminous environmental studies were flawed and asking the court to order the city to conduct additional analysis.

The two lawsuits, filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court, join a similar petition submitted Monday by the city of El Segundo. Under state law, opponents of the LAX plan have until today - one month after the City Council's approval of the proposal - to challenge the \$11-billion plan in court.

The county joined with the cities of Inglewood and Culver City in one of Thursday's lawsuits, and the Alliance for a Regional Solution to Airport Congestion filed the second action. The city of Los Angeles, the City Council, Mayor James K. Hahn, the Airport Commission and the city's airport agency were named in both.

All three suits filed this week share a similar theme: that Los Angeles violated state environmental law by misrepresenting the airport's passenger capacity, by ignoring public comments and by failing to include adequate measures to ease additional noise, air pollution and traffic.

The lawsuits also claim that the plan's environmental studies understate its negative effect on air quality, noise and traffic.

Hahn's LAX plan "is the quintessential red herring aimed at disarming the opposition of public entities . which represent virtually all of the many thousands of citizens, predominantly minority and low-income, who will suffer the vast bulk of the project's adverse environmental impacts," according to the 59-page petition filed by the county and the cities of Inglewood and Culver City.

All three suits ask the court to invalidate the City Council's approval of the LAX plan last month and bar any work until a more detailed analysis is completed.

The three lawsuits could be consolidated if a judge finds that they contain similar allegations.

The Federal Aviation Administration reiterated that litigation wouldn't deter the agency from issuing a decision on the plan by the end of March.

The mayor's office said that it had expected the litigation and that it remains in negotiations with the county and neighboring cities to find a way to address their concerns.

"The mayor is confident we'll be able to reach an agreement that everyone is satisfied with," said

Elizabeth Kaltman, a mayoral spokeswoman. "Mayor Hahn is also confident that the EIR will stand up to scrutiny."

County supervisors said Thursday that they filed suit to preserve their legal options, but added that if their concerns are not met, they would proceed with the litigation.

"The county's lawsuit is a placeholder, if negotiations with the city of Los Angeles fail," said Supervisor Don Knabe, who represents airport-area residents.

The county has demanded that city officials cap LAX at 78 million annual passengers and eliminate the centerpiece of Hahn's plan, a remote check-in center near the San Diego Freeway.

The city has argued that it cannot legally constrain passenger growth at LAX and cannot scrap the check-in center without starting the process over.

To mollify critics, the mayor's LAX plan was modified earlier last year to divide it into two phases.

The first includes a transit hub, an elevated tram, a consolidated rental-car center and the relocation of the southernmost runway closer to El Segundo.

The most controversial projects, including the check-in center, were put in a second phase in which they would undergo more rigorous environmental, traffic and security studies before construction.

The lawsuits charge that this last-minute change violated state law because officials didn't conduct additional environmental studies on the altered plan.

"The division of the LAX Master Plan into projects that will definitely go forward and those that may not renders the description of the expansion plan and its impacts unreliable," wrote Jan Chatten-Brown, an attorney for the Alliance for a Regional Solution to Airport Congestion, in its 34-page petition.

Fresno Co. farm bureau draws national attention

Its work with Asian farmers is in the spotlight.

By Dennis Pollock

[Friday, January 7, 2005, Fresno Bee](#)

The Fresno County Farm Bureau will be showcased at a national farm bureau convention Sunday and Monday for bringing together about 100 Asian immigrant farmers and air-quality regulators last spring to explain new rules on burning farm waste.

The county organization is one of two from California that will be among 15 nationwide taking part in a County Farm Bureau Idea Exchange at the American Farm Bureau Federation annual meeting in Charlotte, N.C.

The second California farm bureau, from San Joaquin County, was chosen for its innovative approach to addressing state budget cuts by making locally grown farm products available for home economics classes.

The Fresno County effort was "much needed," said Chukou Thao, director of the Small Farm Resource and Training Center in Fresno. "There were individual farmers who needed help, and this brought all the agencies to the table."

Presenters at the workshop included representatives of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture Risk Management and the farm bureau, Thao said. The proceedings were translated into Hmong, Laotian and Cambodian Khmer. New air-quality rules had restricted burning, and the farmers were coping with how to legally dispose of trellised vegetables such as bittermelons, moqua and cherry tomatoes after harvest.

As a follow-up to the workshop, the farm bureau helped the farmers obtain shredding equipment to deal with the farm waste in an environmentally friendly way.

Karla Fullerton, executive director of the Fresno County Farm Bureau, said a grant from Clean Air Now provided two shredders and two trailers. Cherta Farms donated use of two tractors.

"Last year, it was one of our objectives to diversify the farm bureau," Fullerton said. "We also put together a safety video for Oaxacan farmworkers."

She will attend the national farm bureau meeting along with Pat Ricchiuti, current president of the county Farm Bureau, and past President Debbie Jacobsen.

The San Joaquin County effort addressed budget constraints that had reduced cooking instruction in home economics classes.

The farm bureau worked with the San Joaquin-Stanislaus Cattlewomen and the local chapter of California Women for Agriculture to arrange donations of fresh fruits, vegetables and meats to 36 public schools to help the programs.

Students in the home economics classes also received recipes and food-handling and nutritional information about each of the commodities provided.

The purpose of the Farm Bureau Idea Exchange "is to recognize programs and ideas that could be implemented by other farm bureaus," said Dave Kranz, a spokesman for the California Farm Bureau Federation. "It's an idea incubator for the thousands of farmers from all across the country who will gather at the annual meeting."

California is one of six states that will be represented by two county farm bureaus at the event, Kranz said. The others are Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri and New York. A county from each of three states - Indiana, Kentucky and New Hampshire - also will be represented.

SoCal air plan would reduce some smog emissions by 20 percent

Chris T. Ngyen, Associated Press Writer

[Friday, January 7, San Francisco Chronicle](#)

LOS ANGELES (AP) -- Southern California clean air regulators adopted a plan Friday to reduce emissions at about 300 power plants, factories and refineries by 20 percent over five years.

The plan, which takes effect beginning 2007, amends a program started 10 years ago by the South Coast Air Quality Management District and seeks to reduce smog-causing emissions by a total of 7.7 tons per day over the five-year period.

"We believe the changes meet state law requirements and maintain the integrity of the program, while continuing to move closer to the region's air quality goals," Barry Wallerstein, executive officer of the AQMD, said in a statement.

The district, which covers Orange County and parts of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties, has the worst air quality in the nation.

The emissions reduction program that started in 1994 allows major polluters in the region to buy credits for a certain amount of air pollution they release. It was intended to provide a financial incentive to cut emissions, since it costs more money to pollute the air.

The district's new proposals would reduce emissions by making fewer credits available, forcing plants and refineries to implement pollution control measures, said AQMD spokesman Sam Atwood.

Julie Masters, senior project attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, said she was pleased with the decision that would help bring emissions up to state and federal standards.

"We're very happy that the district did not give in to industry pressure, but we would have liked to see them go a little further," she said.

The new regulations, however, would be a financial burden for industries, said Peter Hidalgo, spokesman for the Southern California Gas Co.

"We clearly accept the need to help emissions reduction in the region and achieve clean air, but the challenge is the cost to reach the new levels," he said. "We want to find less costly ways to reach the same amount of emissions reductions."

VW touting air-friendly diesel fuels

A redesigned Jetta unveiled in an attempt to reinvigorate brand

By GARY GENTILE - THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Friday, Jan. 7, Modesto Bee

LOS ANGELES - Volkswagen will push clean-burning diesel fuel over gas-electric hybrid and fuel-cell technology as a means to meet evertightening emissions requirements, especially in California, the company's chairman said.

Bernd Pischetsrieder, chairman of the German automaker, detailed the company's vision in a keynote speech at the Los Angeles Auto Show as the company unveiled its redesigned Jetta, the first step in its plan to boost sagging sales of its vehicles in North America.

The company said the Jetta would be the first of nine models to be introduced over the next 18 months. Sales of Volkswagen vehicles fell 16 percent in 2004. The company said the new models would return to the company's roots of tighthandling European performance cars in an attempt to reinvigorate the brand.

While the carmaker unveiled its latest model Wednesday, it also outlined its plan to produce diesel-engine cars that burn new, cleaner fuels as an alternative to gas-electric hybrids and hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles, which the company said would not be practical for at least two more decades.

"In the end, what matters isn't what works in the laboratory. It's what works on the road. And for many years to come, it will be a fuel that is liquid," Pischetsrieder said during his speech.

"Therefore, what we need are practical solutions that utilize the massive infrastructure that already exists around the automobile, from assembly plants to gas stations, and we need a fuel that reduces the emissions in the existing fleet of cars."

Testing soy-based fuel

Pischetsrieder said Volkswagen is working with Archer Daniels Midland on a soy-based fuel that could be blended with conventional diesel to reduce emissions by 10 percent to 20 percent.

The company also is backing research into liquefying natural gas into a cleaner-burning diesel fuel. A third alternative would be converting plant life into a synthetic fuel that could be blended with diesel.

Pischetsrieder said all three options "are futuristic, but they are also realistic. Just as important, these technologies work now."

Pischetsrieder said that while diesel cars have become popular in Europe, an education campaign would have to be launched in North America to overcome perceptions of diesel cars as noisy and smelly.

"We had the same image in Europe for many, many years," he said in an interview. But as more cars became available, the technology was accepted widely, he said.

Volkswagen is working on a diesel fuel-electric hybrid and supports work on fuel-cell vehicles while also pushing for wider acceptance of diesel cars, he said.

Ford intends to introduce its 2005 Mustang convertible at the show. A number of concept cars also will be displayed.

More than two dozen world and North American debuts are expected at the show, which runs through Jan. 16 at the Los Angeles Convention Center.

Unprecedented war on the environment

By Richard Heil

[Monday, Jan. 10, Tri Valley Herald, Commentary](#)

A century ago, Republican President Theodore Roosevelt returned from a camping trip with John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, so inspired that he founded our country's National Park System. Richard Nixon ushered in the era of environmental protection when he signed the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. Ronald Reagan strengthened the Superfund program to clean up our nation's toxic waste sites and George H.W. Bush strengthened the Clean Air Act.

Historically, protecting our precious air, water, forests, wildlife and public health has been a bipartisan tradition, and Republicans have a proud legacy of stewardship on which to stand. That tradition came to an end with the current Bush administration.

Our nation's environmental safety net has worked well for more than 40 years and has dramatically improved the health and safety of millions of Americans. This administration is rapidly and with ruthless efficiency dismantling that safety net.

In doing so, it has unilaterally stripped long-standing environmental protections from fully one-tenth of the landmass of our country, it is poisoning the air we breathe and the water we drink, it has dramatically increased taxpayer-subsidized, clear-cut logging in our national forests, and it is reducing our national security by increasing our dependency on foreign oil.

Polls consistently show that the American people do not share this administration's extreme views on the environment. They expect their government to enforce, rather than weaken, the laws that protect their air and water. They want to pass on to future generations a healthy, livable planet. If the people knew that the Bush administration had gone AWOL on the environment, they would not stand for it. The problem is that the American people, by and large, do not know. That is no accident.

The Bush administration is extremely good at hiding its anti-environment agenda, through a well-crafted, ongoing strategy of deceit. It's a strategy based on saying one thing and doing another, systematically censoring and falsifying science, and acting in secret or below the radar of most Americans.

It takes a lot of nerve to propose a "Clear Skies Initiative" that increases the health risks to millions of Americans by letting polluters pollute far more than they could under the existing Clean Air Act. It takes a lot of nerve to propose a "Healthy Forests Initiative" that authorizes massive taxpayer-subsidized, clear-cut logging of old-growth trees on our public lands, without reducing fire danger to homes. This is only part of what this administration has done.

The Bush administration speaks of "sound science," but for this administration that's code for "sounding like we care about science." In reality, it couldn't care less. More than 5000 scientists, including 48 Nobel laureates and 62 National Medal of Science recipients, released a statement

last year expressing strong concerns about how the Bush administration manipulates, suppresses and ignores scientific information.

Beyond this, the Bush administration conducts its destructive work in secret. A good example of this was the administration's Energy Task Force, which met behind closed doors with oil and gas, mining and power companies and collectively crafted a national energy policy that would increase America's dependence on oil and allow new energy projects to bypass even our most basic environmental laws.

Protecting the air we breathe, the water we drink and our extraordinary wilderness and wildlife is a fundamental, moral test of our generation and must be a common endeavor. It has not been and should not be a question of rich or poor, urban or rural, or Republican or Democrat. Yet the Bush administration has made it this way, and we have every reason to believe that the situation will get worse, not better. In doing so, the administration has failed this historic test and left our country diminished and our families at risk.

Robert J. Heil lives in Oakland and is a national volunteer leader for the Sierra Club.

Improved 99 is a noble goal

[Visalia Times-Delta, Editorial, Monday, Jan. 10, 2005](#)

Efforts by U.S. Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Tulare, to obtain federal funding and upgraded status for Highway 99 are starting to take on a quixotic tone. But we would not dissuade him.

On the contrary, we urge Nunes to continue his dogged pursuit of an interstate designation, or its equivalent, for the San Joaquin Valley's principal freeway.

When one thinks about it, there is probably nothing Nunes could accomplish in the House of Representatives that would have a greater impact on Valley life than improvement of Highway 99. It is clearly the Valley's river. Its condition and improvement are crucial to the Valley's economic development, air quality, safety, quality of life, commerce and a host of other elements.

Ironically, Nunes' simple notion of widening and expanding the scope of 99 has encountered several obstacles since he first started pushing it nearly two years ago. He had to finagle language into the federal transportation bill. His appeal for support from state lawmakers from the Valley was nearly scotched by state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter. Sacramento was reluctant to lend support, fearing it would be on the hook for paying for upgrades. Finally, the transportation bill itself died before the Congress adjourned.

So Nunes is at it again.

As he has noted, Nunes doesn't particularly care about the details of nomenclature or jurisdiction: He just would like to see Highway 99 widened fully, with full shoulders, wide lanes and the other features that mark interstate freeways. Whether that happens by calling it an interstate or a farm-to-market highway or something else doesn't matter so much as getting the improvements for the highway.

Tens of thousands of motorists travel Highway 99 every day just in our area, and they would all have to agree they would like a highway that is more efficient, wider, better marked and safer than the one they take to every day.

Moving people, produce and goods along Highway 99 and up and down the state becomes more important every year, and it is the easiest and quickest remedy toward solving some growing problems of traffic congestion and [air pollution](#).

So when Nunes declared last week that one of his priorities in this congressional session is getting funding for Highway 99 improvements -again -we say more power to him. If at first you don't succeed ... Eventually this try will succeed, and the Valley will be better for it.

Highway rule change a gem

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Monday, Jan. 10, 2005](#)

Even at the risk of the state having its knuckles rapped by Washington, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger should proceed with his plan to open freeway diamond lanes to hybrid cars even if they have only one passenger.

The popular measure -- which is being considered in other states as well -- was put on hold when Washington refused to grant what was assumed to be a routine approval. Such an OK is required on highways partly funded by federal tax dollars. Most diamond lanes are on such highways.

The idea is to create greater incentives for people to buy the expensive cars which get 45 miles-per-gallon or more and create fewer emissions than standard automobiles.

Although now relatively few in number, ultimately such a rule change might alleviate traffic on more conventional roads as the popularity of the cars continues.

The California Highway Patrol says it will ticket violators at nearly \$300 a clip until the rule is formally changed. To avoid that the governor ought to go full speed ahead to put the rule in place, which benefits the environment and traffic flow.

This may be another example of the Bush administration not giving a tinker's damn about California and our needs. But it should because everyone benefits.

Pro: Warming theories should be fully questioned.

By H. Sterling Burnett

[Fresno Bee Vision section, on global warming, Sunday, Jan. 9, 2005:](#)

DALLAS -- Global warming is hot! -- pun fully intended.

Within the space of a year, a blockbuster action movie and now a sure-to-be best-selling novel have both focused on the perils and political intrigues surrounding the question of whether, or to what extent, humans are causing the planet to overheat with all manner of apocalyptic results.

Though the Fox Studio disaster flick "The Day After Tomorrow" was panned by scientists who pointed out its portrayal of climate science was wildly inaccurate, it won praise from environmentalists and some politicians for "focusing attention on the important topic of human-caused global warming."

Of course, in the movie, global warming was a fact and environmentalists were world-saviors. By contrast, novelist Michael Crichton's latest book, "State of Fear," has raised the ire of environmentalists. Why has he not garnered the same praise for bringing global warming to the world's attention? Perhaps because Crichton portrays global warming as a hoax and the environmental lobbyists pushing the hoax as villains, eager to use bad science to raise money and attain political power.

Never fear, this is not a work of political screed, but rather a deftly crafted action and adventure novel. Like much of the best fiction on TV, in the movie houses and in the bookstores it happens to use a controversial, overly publicized contemporary political and social issue -- human-caused global warming -- as a backdrop for a story filled with attractive heroes and heroines, ingenious, seemingly indestructible secret agents, and villains plotting world domination. There is enough sex, murder and general mayhem to please any connoisseur of spy novels or the action-adventure genre in general, and Crichton fans in particular.

In "State of Fear" Crichton, as he does with many of his books, deals with scientific issues with a detailed eye stemming from his training as a medical doctor. In the past, Crichton's scientific lens has been trained on topics such as genetic engineering, and environmentalists loved it since the novels were cautionary tales in the vein of "Frankenstein," warning of humanity's overreaching and violating the "laws of nature."

However, now it is Crichton's scientific acumen that seems to be the central cause for the environmentalists' venom. For instance, Crichton exposes serious problems with the climate models that predict warming. The models don't accurately portray past or current temperature reality, so why should their predictions about the future warming be trusted, much less used to inform public policy?

Crichton's research has evidently lead him to be skeptical of the claim that humans are causing catastrophic climate change and to think that at least some environmentalists are pushing the issue for fundraising purposes and to gain political power.

The thriller comes equipped with footnotes, charts and two appendices detailing why the author believes politicized science is dangerous. Environmentalists find this threatening because there is a lot of truth in his thesis, and they know that he has an audience of millions of readers who might, after reading the novel, turn their own skeptical eyes to claims that the "end is near" due to global warming if we don't fundamentally alter our economy.

I must admit, sitting in Dallas in December watching snow fall in the midst of below freezing temperatures -- not typical Texas weather, even during the winter -- it would be hard to take global warming alarmism seriously even had I not, after years of seriously studying and working on the issue, concluded that the disaster scenarios spun by environmentalists from human-caused global warming are more fiction than fact.

As for now, I think I'll curl up by the fire and read a good book -- "State of Fear" fits the bill well.

H. Sterling Burnett is a senior fellow at the National Center for Policy Analysis.

Con: Blowing off ecological threats makes no sense

By Wayne Madsen

WASHINGTON -- Michael Crichton's new novel, "State of Fear," not only unfairly bashes the global environmental movement but represents yet another example of how multinational corporations and their political allies are invading the popular culture to advance fanatic and lunatic right-wing ideas and agendas.

The book demonizes scientists who argue that the world is heading toward cataclysmic weather change unless something is done about the spewing forth of greenhouse gases into Earth's atmosphere.

Crichton develops a story line that has environmentalists and scientists creating weather-making doomsday machines that wreak havoc on the planet.

Killer hurricanes, towering tidal waves and destructive lightning storms are all meant to prove the scientists' point about the deadly effects of global warming. The environmentalists are the villains. The corporate shills who have been paid big bucks to debunk the global warming community are the good guys. According to Crichton, global warming is a myth.

In today's world of increasing corporate control of almost every facet of our public and private lives, Crichton's screed against the environmental movement should come as no great surprise. After all, the publisher of "State of Fear" is Harper Collins, a wholly owned subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., the same people who feed Americans and people around the world a daily dosage of right-wing propaganda billed as 24-hour news.

Murdoch can wave his big money around and always expect to find some novelist; screenwriter; movie director; journalist; left, center or right-wing magazine editor; cartoonist; or research institute fellow to allow himself or herself to become human versions of coin-operated nickelodeons or Laundromats.

Crichton is no different than crossword puzzle editors who are now paid to include as answers to their clues the names of corporations and brand names as a form of subtle advertising -- a new low in the newspaper business.

It is obvious that Murdoch will eventually have his Fox movie arm put Crichton's global eco-terrorism conspiracy tale on the big screen to counteract the climate change warning conveyed by Roland Emmerich's global disaster flick "The Day After Tomorrow."

Crichton's book, perhaps not coincidentally, comes at a time the Bush administration is blowing off the Arctic meltdown concerns raised in the Arctic Climate Change Assessment initiated by regional Arctic nations and native tribal peoples.

Murdoch and his corporate cronies may want to think twice before using a science-fiction messenger like Crichton, who has suggested in his previous novel, "Jurassic Park," that living dinosaurs can be recreated using 65-million year-old DNA extracted from the blood of mosquitoes encased in amber to launch a tirade against actual and reasoned scientists.

Unlike the "silly science" of Crichton, a group of 300 scientists recently concluded that the Arctic is warming much more rapidly than previously known. Disappearing are the Greenland Ice Sheet and the Arctic icepack. Similar melting is occurring in Antarctica with the largest recorded iceberg now causing devastation to indigenous species and science stations.

Crichton's fictional broadside against environmentalists comes at a time when the right-wing and its corporate masters are stooping to all sorts of chicanery to muddy the waters with regard to global warming.

Some ludicrous right-wingers have even suggested that eminent global warming experts like Rajendra K. Pachauri are somehow irresponsibly focusing the world's attention away from the war on Islamic terrorism.

And then comes along Crichton with his novel about global eco-terrorism. It is pathetic that the neo-conservatives, mega-media perception managers, and multinational corporations have resorted to such McCarthyite tactics to push their sordid and destructive agendas.

Wayne Madsen is a senior fellow at the Electronic Privacy Information Center (www.epic.org <<http://www.epic.org>>).

High speed makes sense

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, Jan. 9, 2005](#)

High speed rail must come to the area sooner rather than later. In response to the costs escalating, one needs to consider the fact that all costs are escalating.

Looking at the bottom line of costs could kill almost any project.

However, with intelligent management, the monies from the construction of this long overdue rail system can return to California in jobs created and materials purchased.

We don't need this rail line for convenience. We seriously need it to try to make a dent in the air pollution problem in this valley.

-- CAROL HOFFMAN, Bakersfield

Why a pollution tax?

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, Jan. 9, 2005](#)

The San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District just voted to put an additional \$2 tax on all future car registrations in our area to help valley farmers (read agricultural corporations) replace their pollution-generating diesel engines.

This new tax supposedly will help the district qualify for matching government funds.

Aren't these the same farmers that have shared in over \$131 billion in federal subsidies (taxpayers' money) over the past nine years? The same farmers who get \$416 million per year in water subsidies (taxpayers' money)?

The same farmers who are getting \$14.7 million (taxpayer's money) from the settlement of a water-rights lawsuit?

Why can't farmers take just a tiny percentage of these billions they are getting from us taxpayers and replace their own diesel engines? Also, I doubt that the matching funds are really available. Last time I checked, the state is already several billions of dollars in the red again and the feds are running a record deficit.

If my car is producing too much pollution and fails a smog check, I have to pay for all the repairs needed to get it passed. I don't expect any farmers to be forced by the air district to help me pay for the smog repairs.

Why can't the district put the same burden on farmers who are producing pollution? Why can't they leave those of us who are not involved in creating this pollution alone? Farmers can certainly afford it.

-- WILBUR W. WELLS, Tehachapi