

Dairy industry asked to do more on air

By RAY ESTRADA / Vida en el Valle
Vida en el Valle Wed., March 14, 2007

A group of medical, labor union and church leaders called Friday for tougher restrictions on proposed dairies in the Valley to help fight air and water pollution that affects most residents, especially Latinos.

Michelle Garcia, acting executive director of the American Lung Association office in Fresno, said most of her family members suffer from asthma, which can be attributed in large part to the air pollution caused by the growing number of dairies in Fresno County and surrounding areas.

"Hispanics have a very large incidence of asthma here in the Valley," Garcia said after a news conference at her office. "They make up, and they have a higher burden of asthma ... They are breathing in all this pollution. Many are farmworkers and they may not have health insurance so the burden lies heavily on them."

Garcia said the Valley asthma rate has increased over the years to one in five children. "Based on our services here in the Valley, I would say about 90 percent go to the Hispanic population," she said. Dairies produce ammonia, methane and volatile organic compounds.

Garcia was joined by representatives from nurses in the Service Employees International Union, the League of Women Voters, the Rev. David Schlicher and Dr. Lee Snyder, who all called for the Fresno County Board of Supervisors to call on the dairy industry to regulate and monitor such restrictions as lining and covering manure lagoons. They also suggested buffer zones between sensitive areas and requiring conditional use permits.

Snyder, who has practiced medicine in the Valley for 46 years, said while he enjoys dairy products and supports the industry, he wants tougher standards to apply to new dairies to reduce airborne particulate matter that eventually can enter the human blood stream.

Schlicher said it's a "life and death issue" for old and young Valley residents.

When asked if the hard-hit dairy industry -- reeling from last summer's heat that killed hundreds of cows -- would agree to new restrictions, League of Women Voters representative Elizabeth Shields said she believes so. "They understand the economics of this," she said. "They're smart business people."

No one from the dairy industry was present at the news conference.

Snyder said it's unclear exactly when the new "mega dairies" -- those with 700 or more cows -- might be built, but added, "They're knocking on the door." He said if the new dairies are approved, some 50,000 more cows will be brought to Fresno County from Southern California where land costs are rising much higher than in the Valley.

Plans for open air Amtrak station under way

By Maria Miranda - Staff Writer - The Madera Tribune
Madera Tribune Wednesday, March 14, 2007

Plans for a new Amtrak station off Road 26 near BNSF railroad tracks are approaching completion with the appraised property sitting in escrow.

Lincoln Clendenin, the county's road department manager, gave the Board of Supervisors an update on the 1.58-acre, \$2 million project Tuesday morning.

The station - an open, unstaffed shelter and 400-foot platform north of the city - is expected to be completed September 2008, he said. The construction plans are 70 percent complete and all involved agencies, such as Caltrans and the railroad, have signed on.

The station will have lighted parking, low-maintenance landscaping and a pond east of the parking structure for drainage.

"Railroad traffic is always good for the economy," Clendenin said. "It helps create clean air and (lessens) the impact on the roads."

He also said that the new station will provide a necessary service to the people of Madera.

Before construction can begin, the railroad must put in new crossing protection on Road 26 and perform a minor track realignment to the west of the road. Although the board supports the station, there was one concern - a lack of a fully-functioning building. The station would be no more than an overhead shelter that can seat 15 people.

Supervisor Ronn Dominici said many residents were hoping the station would be an actual building that kept travelers out of the cold and rain.

Chairman Vern Moss said to have a fully-functioning station, a staff must be hired and the project size quadrupled.

He said the new platform and shelter were "the best deal we can make in the foreseeable future" due to funding.

However, he said it is possible the station could eventually become staffed. Also, he said the board has commitments from the volunteer service Citizens on Patrol and the sheriff's department to offer increased security.

Supervisor Frank Bigelow said that the existing station near Avenue 15 1/2 and Road 29 was at one time a covered station. But it "became so trashed it had to be removed," leaving only a concrete slab.

"People didn't respect the facility enough to take care of it," he said.

Funds for the project will stem from both the state and the county. The county will use \$244,000 of Measure T funds and the state will provide \$800,000. In June, Clendenin said he will approach the California Transportation Commission for the remaining \$1.2 million. He said he was assured the funds would be available for the project.

Moss said there was also a previous agreement with the city of Madera to help with maintenance costs - an estimated \$2,200 a year.

A cleaner locomotive rides the rails: City runs low-emission train

RICHMOND: Retrofit will prevent an estimated 10 tons of nitrogen oxide emissions in next 20 years

By John Geluardi

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, March 15, 2007

The Richmond Pacific Railroad on Wednesday rolled out a rebuilt "cleaner and greener" locomotive that has been outfitted with low-emission devices.

About 100 people, including elected officials, representatives from air-quality agencies and industrial executives, turned out at the Florida Avenue Rail Yard to celebrate the locomotive. After a few short speeches, attendees boarded two first-class California Zephyr passenger cars, hired specially for the event, to take a tour of the Richmond Pacific's 11-mile line.

"We like to think of ourselves as Richmond's hometown railroad, and we are very aware of community concerns about emission," said Richmond Pacific Superintendent John Cockle. "This was something positive we could do that will have a social benefit."

The \$200,000 retrofit equipped 43-year-old locomotive No. 2285 with devices that will prevent an estimated 10 tons of nitrogen oxide emissions in the next 20 years. Nitrogen oxides have a variety of negative effects on human health and are particularly harmful to the respiratory system.

The rebuilt engine also will help reduce emissions of particulate matter, which is a combination of extremely small particles of dust, chemicals and acids that mix with liquid droplets. Once inhaled, they are embedded in the lungs, where they can cause respiratory problems, particularly in the elderly and very young, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

On Wednesday, Mayor Gayle McLaughlin congratulated the railroad company for its social responsibility.

"I want to thank our own railroad for being innovative and for doing the right thing," she said. "We know that particulate matter causes health problems, and Richmond has some of the highest asthma rates in the Bay Area, and the Richmond Pacific Railroad has set a good example."

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District helped the railroad fund the retrofit with a \$148,000 grant. Richmond Pacific already has begun the process to retrofit its three other locomotives.

"We've retrofitted 25 percent of our line, and we have an application in for one more, which will be done by the end of the year," Cockle said. The fleet of four locomotives should be retrofitted within the next three years, he said.

Richmond Pacific Railroad, with 17 customers, is a short-line railroad that operates only in Richmond. In 2006, the railroad moved 7,600 rail cars loaded with a cargo including bulk ores, petroleum products, ethanol, scrap metal lumber, vegetable oil and frozen food, between its industrial clients and the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroads.

Council rejects electricity station

Members rally to unanimously object to power plant project

By Matt O'Brien, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, March 15, 2007

HAYWARD - One city councilman flew back from the East Coast and another showed up despite a nasty cold to vote against a controversial power plant proposed for west Hayward.

With six of its seven members present, the sitting council voted unanimously Tuesday night to register its opposition to the project.

Texas-based Tierra Energy wants to build a gas-fired turbine plant on Clawiter Road that will generate electricity for the Pacific Gas & Electric grid.

The California Energy Commission has ultimate authority over whether the plant gets built, but the Hayward council used its influence over local land-use policy Tuesday to declare that the plant does not conform with Hayward's general plan and local zoning codes.

State energy officials have said they will take local land-use issues into account as one factor in their months-long review of the proposed 115-megawatt plant.

The council originally was scheduled to vote on the plant on March 6, but after a crowded, hours-long and emotionally charged hearing, City

Councilman Bill Ward used a legislative tactic to postpone the meeting for one week.

Ward, who was scheduled to attend a National League of Cities conference this week in Washington, D.C., was the only member absent from Tuesday's meeting.

Councilman Olden Henson was at the same Washington event over the weekend and was scheduled to be there through Tuesday, but flew back shortly before the council meeting.

The proposed plant, which has been described by Tierra and PG&E officials as a "peaker" plant that would operate only during periods of peak energy demand, has faced strong opposition from residents who live nearby and are concerned about air pollution.

It is the second power plant being proposed for the same west Hayward area.

San Jose-based Calpine Corp. wants to build a much larger, 600-megawatt combined-cycle plant that would operate around the clock and be located closer to the shoreline and at a greater distance from homes.

County rejects growth change

Tsakopoulos' plea to extend planning boundary is denied.

By Mary Lynne Vellinga - Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, March 15, 2007

The Sacramento County supervisors on Wednesday rejected a developer's proposal that they consider opening up 3,400 acres of pasture along the El Dorado County line for development.

The unanimous vote by the five-member board followed more than five hours of testimony from people opposed to the proposal by developer Angelo K. Tsakopoulos to redraw the county's growth boundary to include his property. More than 100 people signed up to speak.

The decision came despite a last-minute offer by Robert Holderness, the lawyer representing Tsakopoulos' AKT Development, to scale back the request to include only the 500 northernmost acres of the eight-mile swath Tsakopoulos had proposed.

Tsakopoulos had argued that expansion north of White Rock Road by Folsom and growth in adjacent El Dorado County made his land ripe for development.

Three supervisors -- Susan Peters, Roberta MacGlashan and Jimmie Yee-- last month said they needed more information before making a decision.

Planning staff members, who opposed the developer's request, returned with an arsenal of maps showing most land across the county line from the Tsakopoulos property remains zoned for agriculture, although the northern portion abuts developments with thousands of homes and a business park.

"Now that we have that information, it's fairly clear that most of what's on the other side of that land is not urban development," MacGlashan said.

Peters said she was concerned that including the area in an environmental study could delay planned improvement of White Rock Road, which borders the property to the north, and jeopardize \$22 million in state-approved funding.

One of the most prominent people to speak against the proposal was former Supervisor Illa Collin, who received cheers as she walked to the podium.

Collin, who recently retired after serving 28 years, explained the rationale behind the growth boundary -- officially known as the urban services boundary -- which was adopted in 1993.

"The county was making a statement that beyond (the line) it would be very expensive and inefficient to provide services, and the county was making a statement that this (area) was not going to urbanize," she said.

Speakers cited traffic, air quality, global warming, the need for urban revitalization and the loss of open space and habitat for birds of prey as reasons to keep growth within the boundary.

Even without considering the Tsakopoulos proposal, the supervisors already have agreed to look at opening more than 20,000 acres to growth.

One of the youngest speakers was Ciara Wirth, home on spring break from Duke University. "I don't want to see the day when people ask me (what Sacramento is like) and I answer, 'There's nothing special about it, really. It's just a bunch of strip malls and low-density residential development.'"

Other speakers reminded the supervisors of the resounding defeat of Measure O, a 2000 ballot initiative sponsored by developer C.C. Myers that would have moved the growth boundary to allow building of a senior golf course community at Deer Creek Hills. After that measure was defeated, Sacramento Valley Conservancy bought the 4,000-acre Deer Creek Hills property and made it an open space preserve.

Tsakopoulos' land abuts Deer Creek Hills on the east.

Graham Brownstein, executive director of the Environmental Council of Sacramento, asked the supervisors to make it clear that the urban services boundary is permanent.

"Anything else sends the signal to developers that we're open for business," he said.

New plan replaces sewage sludge fiasco

Officials embrace waste-to-energy plan for sewage sludge. It didn't work in Los Angeles 15 years ago, but this is different, they say.

By TERI SFORZA

The Orange County Register Thurs., March 15, 2007

In hindsight, it was little more than modern alchemy, "a technological crap game," a massive mistake that burned half a billion public dollars.

Convert sewage sludge into clean-burning energy.

In the 1980s and '90s, officials in Los Angeles spent some \$500 million on two plants that were supposed to do exactly that. But what was elegant in theory turned out to be horrific in reality - abrasive sludge ate through valves, clogged pipes and erupted into flames so hot they took days to extinguish.

The city of Los Angeles' plant scrapped the technology at the heart of its waste-to-energy idea and went with something simpler. The Los Angeles County Sanitation District's plant never went online.

So it is with some déjà vu that officials are now touting the idea of converting sewage sludge to energy. This time, a private company is taking the financial risk of designing and building the plant, not taxpayers. Times - and technology - have changed, officials said. They believe the outcome will be very different now. But still, no one is completely sure - not even renewable energy company EnerTech Environmental, the one taking the risk.

"Can SlurryCarb successfully treat biosolids?" asked a report commissioned by EnerTech in 2005, examining the differences between the failed Los Angeles experiments and its patented SlurryCarb process.

"This question will not be answered definitively until the process is designed, constructed and operated."

The plant is now under construction in Rialto. It was originally scheduled to open this year, but is now expected to come online in 2008.

"The industry never forgets a failure," said Layne Baroldi of the Orange County Sanitation District.

The Orange County Sanitation District, the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, and the cities of Riverside, San Bernardino and Rialto, have all signed contracts to send a collective 675 tons of sewage sludge a day to EnerTech's plant. Missing from this list is the city of Los Angeles, which was courted by EnerTech but didn't sign up.

EnerTech's "SlurryCarb" process will subject sludge to extreme heat and pressure. Cellular structures rupture, carbon dioxide gas splits off, water is easily removed, and what's left is essentially concentrated carbon. That stuff is dried and becomes what EnerTech calls "E-fuel," which will be sold to power cement kilns in place of coal.

SlurryCarb, EnerTech says, is different from the process behind the Los Angeles fiasco, which is called "Carver-Greenfield." Carver-Greenfield used oil to suspend solids as water is evaporated, which led to grave gumming up down the line; SlurryCarb does not. Carver-Greenfield used forced evaporation to remove water, which created yet other problems; SlurryCarb does not.

"Most of (Los Angeles') problems do not apply to the SlurryCarb process because the two processes are designed to do completely different things," says a 2005 report paid for by EnerTech, trying to assuage doubts.

Larry Stauch of Fullerton was surprised to hear that a project like this was going forward again. He worked for the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts during the Carver-Greenfield troubles.

"The energy derived from human waste is small compared with the unbelievable amount of [toxic emissions](#) derived from the conversion process," Stauch said in an e-mail. "This type of facility trades one form of pollution with another. The industrial waste present in our wastewater contains heavy metals such as cyanide, chromium, zinc, and they do not break down in any heat. They just become airborne."

A permit has been issued for the Rialto plant by the South Coast Air Quality Management District, air emission controls have been built into the system, and heavy metals will not be released, said Baroldi of the Orange County Sanitation District.

"There are still unknowns about the SlurryCarb process," EnerTech's report says. "However ... the Rialto project has a high likelihood of success."

The Orange County Sanitation District agrees.

"Although the SlurryCarb process is a new technology, much of the equipment used in the process is common in the biosolids industry," says a district report.

Even if the entire project went bellyup, venture capitalists and EnerTech would be left holding the bag, not taxpayers. "The only thing we would be out is time," Baroldi said.

The problem of what to do with sewage sludge is getting more problematic - and expensive. It used to be applied to the ground as fertilizer - a cheap option at \$42 a ton - but that is being outlawed as farm counties grow concerned about possible health effects. Turning the gunk into fuel with EnerTech will cost the Orange County Sanitation District \$72.40 a ton.

"It's cutting-edge, but we have to be innovative," Baroldi said.

Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Thursday, March 15, 2007:

Pollard column: 'Mod squad' lockout has Parra steamed

BY VIC POLLARD, Californian columnist

SACRAMENTO -- Few lawmakers try harder to get along with colleagues than Kern County Assemblywoman Nicole Parra.

So it was surprising when she used words like "shocked" and "uncalled for" when asked to comment about the Senate's liberal Democratic leader, Don Perata, punishing three moderate Democratic senators by locking them out of their offices Monday morning.

Their "crime" was attending a dinner last Thursday evening to raise money for the "mod squad," a group of moderate, business-friendly Democrats chaired by Parra.

Perata refused to discuss the reasons for his action, but it was the worst-kept secret in Sacramento that he was sending a message: He will tolerate no ideological sub-caucuses that try to exert independent influence within the larger Senate Democratic Caucus.

The three locked-out senators were Ron Calderon of Montebello, Lou Correa of Santa Ana and Gloria Negrete-McLeod of Chino. Perata had the locks on their office doors changed before they returned from their districts after the weekend.

Although they had been allowed back in by midafternoon, the incident dominated conversation in the Capitol all day Monday. It was the latest example of a powerful legislative leader meting out punishment to members of his own party for acts considered to be disloyal or disobedient.

For the last few years in the Assembly, the "mod squad" has consisted of 10 to 12 moderate Democrats who team up with Republicans from time to time to defeat or force amendments to bills opposed by business.

They have been instrumental in killing or watering down a number of measures, including bills to allow renters to withhold information from landlords and give the state more authority to regulate toxic substances.

[Parra herself led the mod squad charge last year that defeated a bill to overhaul the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which has been criticized by environmentalists for being too easy on the agriculture and oil industries.](#)

Up to now, there has been no counterpart in the Senate. But Calderon, Correa and Negrete-McLeod are all former members of the Assembly group that have moved up to the Senate, and observers say they could form the nucleus of a potential Senate version of the mod squad.

Parra, elected from the conservative-leaning 30th Assembly District on the west side of the valley, has been a member of the Assembly group from the start. She was elected chairwoman of the group last September as the Legislature adjourned for the year.

On Monday, she wouldn't discuss the issue, saying to the *Los Angeles Times* only that "It seems like a Senate internal issue."

But by Wednesday, when I called, she was steamed about Perata's treatment of Democratic lawmakers who have to answer to conservative constituents like hers.

"I'm an elected official and my district and my constituents are just as important as the leadership's districts and constituents," she said.

"And for Sen. Perata to lock them out of their offices, I think is uncalled for. I'm shocked."

She also dismissed Perata's complaints about sub-caucuses.

"In the Senate they have members of the Latino Caucus and the Women's Caucus and they vote as a block," she said. "And I'm a member of both of them."

She noted that Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, at least as liberal as Perata, has been more tolerant of the mod squad.

"The Assembly speaker has a more open relationship with the (moderate) caucus," she said.

The Thursday night fundraiser was an attempt by Parra to boost its influence. She said it raised \$232,000 that will be used for mod squad travel expenses and to pay staff to analyze the impact of bills.

It was followed last Friday by a daylong "policy retreat" attended by eight members of the caucus at a Sacramento hotel.

Parra also said she has changed the group's name to the New Democrat Caucus, in line with the moderate congressional New Democrat Coalition co-founded by her former boss, ex-Rep. Cal Dooley.

But she acknowledged the new title is unlikely to replace the more colorful "mod squad" in the minds of most Capitol folks.

[Letter to the Editor, Sacramento Bee, Thursday, March 15, 2007:](#)

Development is the problem

Development in the Anatolia area has caused major problems in traffic, water and air pollution since it first broke ground. Let's clean up the mess in an already approved area before using "bought for" politicians to begin the process of creating more!

Patricia Lytle, Rancho Murieta

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, March 15, 2007:](#)

Eyes wide open

My family has been trying to do our small part to help ease global warming and conserve energy. But thanks to Larry Parmeter (letter March 8), I now realize that we've been duped into making sacrifices for the common good that Al Gore and the "Hollywood glitterati" haven't made themselves.

By installing solar panels and energy-efficient windows, for example, we've sacrificed huge chunks of our Pacific Gas Electric bill. And by walking and riding my bike when I can, I've personally sacrificed about 30 pounds over the last few years. And I don't even want to think about how much gas we've missed out on buying.

What fools we've been!

Mike Dunne, Fresno

Won't change the facts

Re Matt McIntyre's letter March 4: All the sarcasm in the world is not going to change the global warming problem -- but the sarcasm and denial will slow down whatever we humans may be able to do about it.

Gary Simpson, Visalia

Martian warming

I understand the temperature of Mars has increased the same as the temperature on Earth. It couldn't be the sun going through a warming cycle; must be those Martians and their damn SUVs.

Where's Al Gore when you really need him?

Mo Anderson, Fresno