

Researcher: Farmers get bad rap

Official says agriculture is blamed too much for dust-borne pollution

Wire reports

Tri-Valley Herald, May 23, 2004

FRESNO -- A federal air-quality researcher said agriculture may be shouldering too much of the blame for dust-borne pollution.

Engineer Michael Buser of the Agriculture Research Service in Lubbock, Texas, said federal air sampling equipment has been capturing dust particles that are too large to be considered particulate pollution, and so has overstated the amount of pollution in the dust raised by agriculture during activities like tilling and running feedlots.

This data has been used in calculations that determined that farming accounts for half of the San Joaquin Valley's dust-borne particle pollution, Buser said.

Medical research has linked particulate pollution -- the incidence of specks that are less than one-seventh the width of a human hair -- to lung disease, heart problems and premature deaths. State air officials, who control the particulate estimates in California, said they were aware of Buser's data, and have studied the issue closely, but are still not completely convinced.

"We don't know what will ultimately come of it," said spokeswoman Gennet Paauwe of the California Air Resources Board. "At this point, there's nothing sufficiently accepted enough to consider updating any of our estimates."

Buser's agency is an arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He was scheduled to be a part of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's discussions on the more than 100 ways farmers can reduce particulate matter in dust.

Car owners turning to vegetable oil as cleaner, cheaper fuel alternative

Laura Walsh, Associated Press

Published in the San Francisco Chronicle - Sunday, May 23, 2004

As the nation grapples with pumped-up gas prices, car owners are turning to their favorite restaurants for a solution: recycled vegetable oil.

Environmentalists have been using the fuel alternative for years as a way to cut back on sooty emissions, but as gas prices soar above \$2 a gallon, they say their "veggie cars" are also a great way to save some cash.

That was part of the attraction for the Healing Waters, a San Diego-based rock band that recently had a conversion kit installed in its bus for a seven-week cross-country tour.

The band left its hometown on a full tank of vegetable oil and then filled up again at a Chinese restaurant in Missouri before buying 500 gallons during a stop in Massachusetts.

"We only spent \$200 that would have normally cost us about \$1,200, and we probably could have done it all for free if we kept stopping (at restaurants)," said Tony Thorpe, 34, a bassist and vocalist for the band.

Every two weeks, Etta Kantor drives to a local Chinese restaurant to fuel her blue Volkswagen Jetta. She calls ahead and the owner knows to put aside a few buckets of used oil just for her. At home, Kantor uses a colander and a bag filter to remove water and any food particles.

The vegetable oil is then poured into a 15-gallon tank that sits in the back of her Jetta, where a spare tire would usually be kept. With a touch of a button, located above the radio, Kantor can switch from diesel fuel to vegetable oil in seconds.

"Oh, I zip around town, go fast on highways. It's not any different," said Kantor, 58, of Weston.

Restaurants have to pay to get rid of their old vegetable oil and are happy to give it away.

"It saves us a couple of dollars and it helps to save the environment a bit so I thought, 'Why not?'" said Shawn Reilly, a co-owner of Eli's On Whitney, a restaurant in Hamden.

Reilly estimates that it otherwise costs between \$40 and \$60 a month to have the oil removed.

The restaurant's only oil collector, Bridgeport resident Aaron Schlechter, says he picks up about 30 or 40 gallons twice a month. He uses it to fuel his car for his 170-mile commute every day to his job as an environmental consultant in New York.

"The only way that I can assuage my guilt by driving this awful distance is by driving something that isn't consuming fossil fuels and has much more environmentally friendly emissions," Schlechter, 29, said.

Vegetable oil is becoming such a rage that a Massachusetts company called Greasecar, is buying it in bulk from a distributor and selling it to local customers. It sells for 90 cents a gallon, said company founder Justin Carven.

Since 2001, Greasecar has also been selling conversion kits, like the one in the San Diego band's tour bus, that allow diesel cars to run on the recycled oil.

A standard conversion kit sells for \$800 at Greasecar.

"Once you install it, though, you are saving hundreds and hundreds of dollars," Carven said. "The product usually pays for itself within the first year."

Using the conversion kit, the car must be started and stopped on diesel fuel. A separate fuel tank is installed to hold the vegetable oil. Once the car is running and the vegetable oil has heated up, the car can be switched over to run on just vegetable oil.

The oil must be heated because it is thicker and tends to congeal in cold weather.

Similarly, Liquid Solar in Ithaca, N.Y., has contracts with a few local restaurants to collect their used vegetable oil. And in Santa Rosa, Calif., a group of 50 people have formed a co-op to buy the oil in bulk from a local manufacturer and then filter it for their own use.

Although the Environmental Protection Agency has given a stamp of approval for vegetable-based biodiesel, it hasn't approved any recycled oil for sale, said Christine Sansevero, an environmental engineer for EPA.

"You just don't know what's in that oil," she said. "There could be metals, other chemicals that, when burned, could create something you didn't intend to burn. It could also be fine, but it's an unknown."

Battle brews over environmental effects of lawns

By Mark Clayton

The Christian Science Monitor

Published in the Orange County Register, May 24, 2004

Americans love their lawns - so much so that they've planted some 30 million acres of them - from the White House to the California desert.

If you lumped them all together, they could cover an area the size of Mississippi.

But concerns are rising that those lush, weed-free lawns represent an environmental hazard. The problem isn't the lawns themselves, which benefit the environment in many ways, critics say. It's the way they encourage overuse of everything from fertilizer and pesticides to water.

Such practices are coming under increasing scrutiny, not only from environmentalists but also from lawn-industry companies.

"Lawns probably haven't risen to the level of a major national environmental issue - yet," says Paul Parker, executive vice president of the Center for Resource Management in Salt Lake City, a nonprofit environmental group that encourages collaboration among business leaders,

government and environmental groups. "But the acreage of lawns is so significant that water, pesticide use and loss of wildlife habitat are increasingly important."

Consider:

For the first time ever, representatives from the lawn equipment, fertilizer and pesticide industries have joined with environmental groups and the Environmental Protection Agency to create a "Lawn and Environment Coalition." In March, the coalition unveiled the first-ever draft guidelines for national lawn-care practices to help Americans protect the environment while keeping their lawns green.

San Antonio's water department is working with builders to encourage the use of more drought-tolerant grasses in subdivisions. In Milford, Conn., residents hold "freedom lawn" competitions, giving awards to the best-looking lawns that eschew the standard chemical approach.

In Canada, Quebec will restrict the cosmetic use of lawn and garden pesticides beginning next year. Dozens of other Canadian municipalities have also restricted pesticide use.

The National Wildlife Federation and the National Audubon Society are among several groups campaigning to persuade Americans to plant more gardens and plants and less lawn. If attendance at organic lawn-care classes is any indication, consumers are beginning to listen.

Two years ago, Leticia Safran of Natick, Mass., told her husband she was dropping their traditional lawn-care service to go the natural route. "What made me switch was my three kids and our dog," she says. "On the days when the chemical company came to spray the lawn, I just didn't have a good feeling about the little sign they put on lawn - telling us to stay off for two days."

Instead, she hired an organic specialist who treated her lawn with gypsum, compost, humate shale - and a combination fish-emulsion and seaweed spray. This spring her lawn received those ingredients plus a "compost tea" that included yucca extracts and sugar.

The Safrans could be on to the next big thing. About four of five U.S. households have private lawns, according to a 1998 study. They are typically about a third of an acre, and in 2003, Americans spent \$38.4 billion tending those yards and gardens, about \$457 per household, says the National Gardening Association. A growing portion of that money appears to be going organic, observers say.

Scotts, the big fertilizer and yard-care products manufacturer, is developing a new line of organic lawn-care products.

But whether lawns really represent an environmental threat remains hotly debated.

Environmentalists point out that all those lush, weed-free acres sop up gargantuan quantities of water and chemicals. In a typical year, the average lawn consumes about 10,000 gallons of water over and above rainfall, the Environmental Protection Agency reports. Nearly a third of urban water use in the eastern United States goes to lawns, it adds.

In addition, millions of pounds of chemicals get dumped on lawns. In 1999, the last year for which such figures are available, 78 million pounds of yard insecticides, herbicides and fungicides were sold to U.S. households - not including professional applications, the EPA said. If they're overused (and some would argue even when they're not), pesticide and fertilizer runoff can pollute oceans, rivers and groundwater.

Then there are the millions of gallons of gasoline used in lawn equipment, whose engines are generally not as efficient as cars' and can cause significant air pollution, the California Air Resources Board says.

Each year, the U.S. adds about 2 million acres of residential property, a 2001 U.S. Department of Agriculture study reports. The result is a loss of habitat for birds and other animals, says Tess Present of the National Audubon Society. "We recognize that lawns are near and dear to everybody. But we'd like people to start thinking about whether they need as much area in lawn."

Even industry officials agree that more needs to be done to educate consumers.

"We're making sure we're communicating with consumers that applying the right amount of fertilizer is important," says Jim King, spokesman for Scotts, which is part of the new Lawn and Environment Coalition. "Applying twice as much fertilizer or insecticide is not going to get them results that are twice as good."

But lawns also have environmental benefits, these groups point out. For example: Turf saves energy by staying 30-40 degrees cooler than bare soil and 50 or more degrees cooler than streets, helping keep homes cool, notes the Better Lawn and Turf Institute, a trade group.

Grass also produces oxygen, with a 50-by-50-foot patch of lawn producing enough for a family of four, the institute says.

The coalition between environmentalists and manufacturers of yard and garden products is an attempt to bridge sides. "This (coalition) was a way of gaining consensus between groups traditionally at odds," says Allen James of Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment, which represents fertilizer and pesticide companies. But some environmental groups attending the conference disputed the guidelines, which are still under development.

Even defining "organic" remains problematic. "Not all organic care is the same," says Nick Novick, who runs Small Planet Landscaping in Ashland, Mass. "We're at the point in this industry that organic foods were a few years ago. We need standards and government enforcement."

That seems to be coming. The Northeast Organic Farming Association recently published the first-in-the-nation technical standards for organic yard care.

Pacific Ethanol Goes Public

May 25, 2004

Valley Voice online

Tulare County - With the state and nation reeling under record high gasoline prices and refineries unable to produce much more gasoline, it appears Pacific Ethanol - the company founded by former Secretary of State Bill Jones and other valley players - chose the right time to go public - this week.

Their stock (ACTY) on the NASDAQ has doubled in price since it was revealed Monday that a public company - Florida based Accessity Corp. - merged with Pacific Ethanol and will change its name to the new ethanol production company's.

The company suggests they will be the "leading ethanol production and marketing company in the Western United States." Pacific Ethanol has all permits ready to go to begin construction on a \$60 million ethanol plant in Madera and is prepared to file a plan with Tulare County for a similar biofuel plant across from the Visalia airport.

Ethanol - made from corn and other plant materials - is blended with gasoline in some areas to help fulfill clean air regulations and other places simply because it is cheaper than gas and provides more fuel at a better price, says CEO of Pacific Ethanol Neil Koehler.

In California, where the company is based, ethanol replaced MTBE as of January of this year as an additive to help clean the air and is blended at 5.8% to gasoline. By the end of this year Koehler says California will use about 1 billion gallons of ethanol to blend with gasoline - almost all shipped in from the Midwest.

Koehler's marketing group, Kinergy Marketing LLC and Re-Energy LLC had combined revenue of \$35 million in 2003 marketing ethanol and projects revenue for just marketing this year at \$80 million even before the company opens one of what is expected to be several new West Coast ethanol plants.

Koehler says it's possible the Madera plant could break ground as soon as July with funding in place from banks and the public offering. Construction could take one year.

They already own the former Coast Grain plant in Madera on 137 acres that has high volume rail

spurs to accept unit trains of corn. Koehler says they will work to build a 25% supply of California grown corn to supply the plant providing a new opportunity for local growers.

The Pacific Ethanol site is the only one in California that has successfully secured all state, regional and local discretionary permits necessary to begin construction of an ethanol processing facility, says the company in a news release.

One valuable by-product of ethanol production is a high-quality cattle feed called distillers wet grains, or DWG, which is not generally available in the Central California area. California's Central Valley has the country's densest population of dairy cows, approximately 1 million, of which roughly 500,000 are within 50 miles of Madera. Pacific Ethanol expects to find a ready local market for all the DWG produced at the Madera facility.

Koehler says California could ease the current gasoline supply crisis by simply allowing gasoline companies to blend ethanol at 10% instead of just 5.8%. Adding 4% more motor fuel could make a big difference in meeting demand, he says.

Right now the State Air Board does not allow this. Koehler is lobbying Governor Schwarzenegger to make an executive order to allow the 10% blend that is allowed in virtually every other state.

Both the Madera and Visalia plants will produce some 35 million gallons annually and cost \$50 million each. Pacific Ethanol is one of four ethanol plants in the works in Tulare County - a new growth industry for the valley supplying renewable fuel to a fuel thirsty nation.

Koehler says virtually all the fuel from Madera will be shipped to a blender in Fresno providing local benefits to the driving public.

Koehler says gas producers have incentive to blend ethanol with gasoline not just because it extends supply but because ethanol gets a 52 cent per gallon federal excise tax break - it is at least 52 cents cheaper than gasoline for the blender, he says. Ethanol and gasoline prices today wholesale at the same price - at \$1.70 per gallon so the price of ethanol is \$1.18 because of the tax break.

"It's up to the suppliers whether to pass that on," he notes.

"There is an obvious financial incentive" to blend ethanol but the state ARB is limiting the extent of its use, he complains. Ethanol has the benefit of also increasing the octane number.

While Bill Jones is still involved with the firm along with other family members, his run for public office precludes him from taking a lead role. Besides Koehler, the company includes Kent Kaulfuss of Visalia, owner of Wood Industries Co.

About 13% of the US corn crop is now converted to ethanol as more states mandate its blending or suppliers who choose to use the fuel to extend overall gasoline supplies.

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Farmers may need air permits

New state law removes exemptions for pollution

By Dave Myhra - SAN JOAQUIN BUREAU
Tri-Valley Herald, May 23, 2004

STOCKTON -- The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will offer workshops for farmers and dairy owners to learn if they need to apply for air permits required by new regulations.

Recently adopted state laws require farms and animal feeding operations to get permits if they emit large amounts of air pollution.

In the past, they were exempt from such laws.

State Senate Bill 700 removes those exemptions. Affected farmers and ranchers must submit permit applications by June 30.

Officials say the new rules could be overwhelming to farmers and ranchers, so the air district workshops will help explain the rules

California "is in dire need to reduce air pollution," noted Anthony Presto, public education representative for the air district.

The new requirement means an agricultural operation needs a permit if it is emitting 12.5 tons of ozone-causing material into the air.

The threshold level for permits will drop to 5 tons in the future due to the district's recent air-quality downgrade from severe to extreme non-attainment.

A permit also is required if a ranch or farm is throwing up 35 tons of particulate matter, which includes dust.

In addition to these new regulations, the air district now requires farms that comprise 100 acres or more of contiguous land to adopt plans to reduce airborne particles. These plans have to be in place and implementation needs to begin by July 1.

Workshops will be held in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The sessions will "show farmers how to follow these rules and plans. We also will talk about conservation management practices," Presto said.

For general farm owners, a meeting will begin at 9 a.m. Tuesday at the San Joaquin County Farm Bureau offices, 3290 N. Ad Art Way, Stockton.

For dairy farmers, meetings will be held at 9:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. Tuesday at the Masonic Lodge, 1500 Viking St., Escalon.
For more information, dial the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District at (209) 557-6400.

Air district imposes new pollution rules on farms

May 21, 2004

The Bakersfield Californian
MATT WEISER, Californian staff writer

A new pollution-control program approved Thursday subjects 8,000 valley farms to comprehensive regulation for the first time, but clean-air advocates say the program is compromised by loopholes.

The board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District approved the plan unanimously at its meeting in Fresno. It primarily targets particulate pollution caused by plowing and harvesting on farms. These tiny airborne specs -- one-seventh the width of a human hair -- can cause heart... ([Click here for complete article](#))

Sprawl to the wall

Date: May 20, 2004

The Bakersfield Californian
VIC POLLARD, JENNIFER PLOTNICK and MATT WEISER, Californian staff writers

SACRAMENTO -- Kern County's current population boom will probably taper off in coming years, but the population is still expected to more than double by the middle of the century, state officials predicted Wednesday.

The county will grow from its current 724,900 residents to more than 1.5 million by 2050, they

said.

That was among new population projections issued by the state Department of Finance.

The agency predicted California will gain nearly 19 million residents, growing... ([Click here for complete article](#))

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, May 25, 2004:](#)

'Test only' smog checks an inexplicable burden on drivers

Why is the state of California supporting "Test Only" smog centers by mandating 15% of vehicles be tested at these expensive centers?

I can get a coupon from The Bee for a smog test at \$27 plus certificate, but this year I have to use a "Test Only" center. The biggest company advertising in that same cluster of coupons accepts a \$10 off coupon, bringing down their charge for the same smog service to \$50 plus certificate.

The citizens of this state were all up in arms about an increase in auto license fees and cried for a repeal, even knowing the money was earmarked for people's jobs and needed programs.

But paying more money for the same smog service? Oh, we'll pay, but who does the "campaign contribution" go to? Don't re-elect any of them.

Terry Menke

Fresno