

Air board OKs ag burns; Florez threatens funds

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Also in the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Friday, May 21, 2010

Grape and citrus growers Thursday got a reprieve from a farm burning ban that takes effect June 1, but millions of dollars in state funding for Valley air quality may now be at risk.

State Sen. Dean Florez threatened to start a campaign to cut off funds for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District if the agency went ahead with plans to let certain growers continue burning farm waste. Florez wrote the 2003 law requiring the practice to end this year.

About two-thirds of the district's \$150 million comes from the state.

However, most air district officials downplayed Florez's threat, with some saying it would make little sense to cut off cleanup funds to one of the nation's dirtiest air basins.

"I've heard no compelling reason not to move forward," said district board member Ann Johnston, who is mayor of Stockton. The board voted 8-2 to approve the exemptions, which are available under the law if air officials prove that alternatives to burning are too expensive.

The decision means grape and citrus growers will be exempted from the burning ban because their costs of chipping, grinding and sending the waste to a biomass plant are too high, officials concluded in a 500-page report. If chipping and shredding alternatives become more affordable, grape and citrus growers will be included in the burn ban in the future.

Florez, who has long maintained the district bends policies to benefit industries, could not attend the meeting, instead remaining in Sacramento for a legislative session.

One of his staffers, Susan Good, represented the senator at Thursday's board meeting, reading a demand that the district completely stop farm burning or "it will no longer be able to count on the state to subsidize its efforts to promote clean air."

Board chairman Steve Worthley, a Tulare County supervisor, was visibly upset that Florez would make a threat.

"If he were here today, we would be having a conversation," he said.

Florez also requested a delay in the board's decision until Senate hearings could be convened on the issue. As an incentive, he also offered to push for \$10 million to help subsidize biomass plants that use farm waste.

Board members Henry Jay Foreman, a state appointee, and Mike Lane, a Visalia council member, voted against district staff's recommendation. Foreman said he would like to see all farm burning stopped; Lane said he was concerned about Florez's threat.

District staffers noted that they have complied with the law -- waste burning acreage has dropped 70% since 2002. The board's action Thursday also toughened the district's rules to prevent further burning from many other growers, so that 80% to 90% of the burning acreage has been eliminated in the past eight years.

Without reasonable option, some farmers OK'd to keep crop burning

By Alex Breitler, staff writer

Stockton Record, Friday, May 21, 2010

Some Valley farmers can continue the age-old practice of burning crops in their fields, despite threats from a lawmaker to yank funding for air pollution programs.

A total burn ban was to begin June 1, but the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District agreed Thursday to exempt some crops because burning is the only affordable way to get rid of them.

Lodi-area grape growers are among those exempted. They had argued that wires in trellises made it difficult to take old vines to a biomass plant where they could be converted to energy. The only alternative, the grape growers said, was to burn old vineyards on site.

None too pleased with Thursday's vote was state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, who wrote the 2003 law that required an eventual phaseout of ag burning.

Representatives for Florez argued that the Valley's notoriously dirty air demanded stricter compliance with his law - even though that law does allow for exemptions.

"If the district acts to reduce air pollution from agricultural burning, it will continue to see all of the financial benefits the Legislature provides to the air district," Florez said in a letter read by his district director, Susan Good. "(The district) cannot support dirty air and expect the state to pay the air district's bills.

"Asthma victims can't live with any exemptions, nor should the board adopt them today," Florez wrote.

Board Vice Chairman Steven Worthley of Tulare County said it was "reprehensible" that Florez would send such a letter without attending Thursday's meeting. Good said Florez intended to be there, but the Senate was in session.

Kern County Supervisor Ray Watson accused Florez of using bully tactics. "I think it's disgraceful," he said.

Stockton Mayor Ann Johnston, who serves on the board, also supported the exemptions, saying she thought the plan was balanced and fair.

Air pollution from ag burning has dropped about 70 percent since Florez's law took effect. Additional restrictions approved Thursday would increase the reduction to 80 percent to 90 percent, district staff said, adding that the exemptions for grape growers and citrus farmers would have "little or no effect" on public health.

The exemptions must still be approved by the California Air Resources Board.

Vocational training firm principals charged with exposing students to asbestos

Turlock Journal, Friday, May 21, 2010

Charges of felony child endangerment were filed against three officers of Firm Build, the now-defunct, non-profit construction training company. The charges stem from an allegation that they used teenage student workers to remove asbestos containing material on a building project at the former Castle Air Force Base. The students were not advised of the presence of asbestos or provided appropriated safety equipment training. Asbestos can cause serious lung problems and cancer, according to the U.S. Department of Human Services.

The Merced County District Attorney's Office issued warrants for Rudy Buendia III, 47, of Planada and Joseph Cuellar, 70, of Fresno, both Firm Build co-managers, and Patrick Bowman, 43, of Los

Banos, Firm Build Board president and former coordinator for the Merced County Office of Education. Buendia and Bowman surrendered on Wednesday at the Merced County Jail and were taken into custody. Bail was set for \$500,000. Cuellar was scheduled to surrender on Thursday at the Fresno County Jail.

The Merced District Attorney's Office reported that as many as 80 teenagers may have been exposed to asbestos containing materials while working at the Automobile Training Center project at Castle over a seven month period of time in 2005 and 2006. All of the students were participating in the Career and Alternative Education Division of the Merced County Office of Education, created to provide vocational training to at-risk high school students through enrollment in the Regional Occupational Program and the Workplace Learning Academy. The students who were part of the Workplace Learning Academy received school credits while other students were paid through the Regional Occupational Program.

Late last year, District Attorney investigators learned that some of the students were tasked with removal of asbestos containing material by Firm Build as part of their duties at the Automotive Training Center, the former motor pool at Castle Air Force Base. None of the students were advised that they were removing asbestos containing materials. State and federal law prohibit anyone from removing asbestos containing material without appropriate training and equipment. The only safety equipment provided the students were paper dust masks, goggles and hardhats, none of which provided the necessary protection from airborne asbestos fibers and none of which met minimum state or federal standards for asbestos removal, said Merced District Attorney Larry Morse II.

Interviews by District Attorney investigators with five students and two job coaches assigned to the project confirmed students were used in the demolition, removal and disposal of asbestos containing material. Morse said a review of the Firm Build student activity logs indicated that as many as 80 students may have been assigned to the Castle ATC project. DA investigators spent months trying to locate and interview students, some of whom have left the area or state.

"The idea that anyone would knowingly expose school kids to potentially cancer causing materials simply to cut corners on a construction project is shocking to say the least," Morse said. "Parents that allowed their kids to participate in these programs hoped they would gain valuable life skills. Instead, it appears that these kids, now young adults, must live with the possibility of developing lung disease or cancer as a result of their participation," he added.

Morse said the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the World Health Organization, the National Cancer Institute and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have all determined that asbestos is a human carcinogen. The EPA banned all use of asbestos in 1989. A study by the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization in 2008 found that, "Asbestos, when inhaled, is extremely difficult for the body to break down, resulting in a sustained irritation within the body's internal structures. Children, in particular, are at a specific risk because they are often less discriminatory about what products they may ingest or inhale. Once within a child's body, the asbestos inflammation may cause harmful scar tissue over several years, ultimately leading to a terminal cancer, called mesothelioma."

In September 2008, arrest warrants were obtained for Buendia, Cuellar, Bowman, Christina Ledezma and Rudy Buendia, Jr., based on information uncovered during the course of a 16 month investigation by the District Attorney's office and multiple local, state and federal agencies into the financial collapse of Firm Build, a non-profit construction skills training program, Morse said. Buendia III and Cuellar, were charged with 15 felony counts each and Bowman, Firm Build's Board president was charged with seven felony counts. Buendia, Jr., pled to a misdemeanor charge of contracting without a license. Ledezma pled to misdemeanor theft charges and is cooperating with the investigation.

The new charges will be filed as part of a separate complaint, Morse said. In addition to five counts of child endangerment, Buendia III, Cuellar and Bowman are charged with five counts of willfully and knowingly exposing a person to hazardous material

Morse advised that individuals who worked at the ATC site should contact Investigator Anna Hazel at the District Attorney's Investigations Division at 385-7383.

Senior event goes green

By Lori Gilbert, staff writer

Stockton Record, Monday, May 24, 2010

Rosemary Atkins was showing off flowers in her garden to a friend one day last week.

"Look at the foxgloves," she said. "It took me two years to get them to bloom."

The 75-year-old has her own compost and her love of gardening is so great she's hoping to create a third community garden for others who don't have their own yards.

She's not signed up for one, but the Stockton resident could have a booth at Senior Awareness Day 2010, the 32nd annual information fair whose theme this year is Gray Goes Green in San Joaquin.

Green-themed booths will join other vendors and nonprofit groups at Thursday's event at Micke Grove Park. The event, which runs from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., also includes a 1.5K walk/run, antique car show, bingo and live entertainment.

"We're just really trying to educate them and give them an opportunity to see what's available to them that might be easier, something they may like to do in their spare time that's moving into the green movement," said event coordinator Annette DePauli, with the San Joaquin Department of Aging.

One of the most obvious green ideas for seniors to consider is air quality. They are grouped with other sensitive individuals, specifically with people who have respiratory ailments and children with developing lungs.

Paying attention to air quality by checking the paper every day is a good idea, said Anthony Presto of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The index ranges from green for good air, yellow for moderate air, orange for air that's unhealthy for sensitive groups and red for air unhealthy for all. When the quality reaches orange or red stages, seniors should stay indoors and limit their activities, Presto said.

Atkinson, who once tried to become completely self-sufficient on a farm, is devoted to living a green lifestyle. She takes canvas bags grocery shopping, reuses plastic bags and runs water into pails as she waits for shower water to warm up, then uses it for other things.

She said her home has too many windows for her to replace all with double-pane windows, but she added insulation to the attic, installed low-flow toilets and had an auditor from the city study the home for its water use to see if they could use less.

"He told us we were among the people that use the least," Atkinson said.

Atkinson's advice for seniors wanting to live greener also includes eating local food to cut down on energy needed to transport it.

She suspects other seniors in her age range are more like her than not.

"I've noticed that senior citizens are already green," Atkinson said. "We've been through World War II. We know what it is to be conservative. We never did get into the consumption mode, and all my peers get upset buying gifts for their grandchildren. Their grandchildren already have so much stuff."

Raised by parents who survived the Depression, Atkinson's peers learned how to get the most use out of things and to do without.

There's still plenty of information to be gained, though, and Senior Awareness Day is a fun event to provide it. In addition to the information booths, the AARP/Walgreens bus will be there to conduct health exams.

Admission is free, with food for sale.

San Joaquin Regional Transit District provides free shuttle service to and from Micke Grove Park for the event. Buses leave on the half-hour from the east side of Claremont Avenue near Yokuts Avenue in Stockton until noon. Return shuttles will run until 3 p.m.

Buses also will ferry passengers from Delta Rehab in Lodi, 1334 S. Ham Lane, and from the Lolly Hansen Senior Center, 375 E. Ninth St. in Tracy. Seniors are required to check in at the senior center before boarding the bus.

Pesticide prompts scuffle over safety in Calif.

By Jacob Adelman - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, May 23, 2010

LOS ANGELES -- The winds that blow across the strawberry fields outside Linda Uvari's home during the spring harvest season carry the tart, sugary smell of the swelling fruits.

Uvari fears that they may soon also carry a cancer-causing pesticide.

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation has proposed replacing a popular fumigant with methyl iodide despite concerns by its own scientific advisory panel that it could poison the air and water.

That's turned the strawberry fields around Uvari's Ventura County home and along the Central Coast into the latest battleground over the chemical that first stoked controversy three years ago when it received federal approval.

"It scares me. I just don't see why they have to use something that is so toxic," Uvari said. "My feeling is that they put profit before people."

The chemical has been applied to more than 15,000 acres of crops over the last two years, mostly in southeastern states, and has not been associated with illnesses, said Jeff Tweedy, head of business development for Tokyo-based pesticide giant Arysta LifeScience Corp., which makes the pesticide.

Opponents say it can take up to 10 years for long-term effects such as cancer to show up and in the nation's richest farm state there's concern among advocacy groups. They say they have seen enough pesticide drift incidents that have sickened workers and nearby residents.

Fumigants such as methyl iodide, which has caused miscarriages in laboratory rats and rabbits and is a known carcinogen, are among the most dangerous class of pesticide, since their gaseous state enables them to drift away from where they are applied, said Susan E. Kegley, a scientist with the Pesticide Action Network.

"You can't help but have people be in the way of that cloud of fumigant as it drifts off," she said.

California's \$1.6 billion strawberry industry would probably be the main user of the substitute for methyl bromide, which is being phased out under an international treaty because it depletes the earth's protective ozone layer.

After strawberries, the state's major methyl bromide users are flower growers, who are concentrated in Ventura and San Diego counties.

Methyl iodide was championed as a safe replacement for methyl bromide when the EPA approved it for use in 2007 over the objections of environmentalists and health experts who questioned whether it could be applied safely.

Opponents included more than 50 National Academy of Sciences members - five of them Nobel laureates - who signed a letter to the agency's administrator warning the chemical's broad agricultural use would result in people being exposed to the carcinogen.

Strawberry growers in Ventura insist it's the only alternative that will help them grow an abundance of the lucrative crop to keep them in business in an area where farmland and labor costs are much higher. It's currently used in Florida, Georgia and other southeastern states to grow crops such as tomatoes and peppers, and has recently been cleared for use in Japan and Turkey.

"We're losing our best fumigant when we lose methyl bromide, so every tool that we have for trying to combat diseases out in the field is going to help," said Andy Hooper, who manages a Ventura County farm that grows strawberries and other crops.

Regulators in California reviewed the pesticide and concluded last month that farmworkers and nearby residents will be safe if it is used with tough restrictions that include applying the chemical beneath a specially designed tarp with a buffer zone of 100 feet to 2,500 feet - four-to-five times the EPA requirement.

Tweedy, the head of business development at Arysta, said he hopes additional safety studies will convince regulators to reduce buffer zones.

The chemical is injected under bare soil weeks before crops are planted and tests have found no traces of the carcinogen in fruit from treated soil, although Kegley said that researchers have not evaluated crops from fields that have been treated with the fumigant over many seasons.

Opponents also fear farmers will ignore the guidelines. They point to violations of other farmworker protections, such as rules about working in the hot sun. At least 12 farmworkers have died from the heat since 2005.

The restrictions "are going to be at best laxly enforced if there is any enforcement at all," said Erik Nicholson, national vice president of United Farm Workers.

The pesticide department's own panel of scientists signaled alarm in their February report, saying that a large number of people would be exposed to methyl iodide if it were used as an agricultural fumigant. That, they said, "would have a significant adverse impact on public health."

The eight-member committee said there wasn't enough data to show that groundwater would be safe, though department spokeswoman Lea Brooks said computer models show it unlikely to affect water quality even under worst-case conditions.

University of Southern California chemistry professor John Froines, who chaired the experts' committee, did not return several phone messages.

Uvari, the Ventura resident whose home abuts a strawberry field, said she and her family were sickened in the mid-90s when a cloud of methyl bromide drifted into her neighborhood. She said she's doing everything she can to stop its more dangerous replacement.

"I definitely do write my legislators and I vote," she said. "And I pray a lot."

Bicyclists push to get Fresno on two wheels

By Ron Orozco, Fresno Bee

Thursday, May 20, 2010

There's a movement afoot to turn Fresno into a more bike-friendly community by adding bike lanes to major streets and creating more bike trails.

The city has developed a master plan to guide the process for building the lanes and trails, which will use \$55 million in Measure C funds to pay for the changes.

This spring, biking supporters, including the Fresno County Bicycle Coalition, launched the marketing campaign "I Bike Fresno" online with a Web site and Facebook page. It is designed to drum up enthusiasm for the master-plan projects, connect bikers and to educate people about the quality-of-life benefits of biking. The goal is to change how people think about biking. "It's a matter of perception," says Ed Smith, vice chairman of the Fresno County Bicycle Coalition. "You interact with others -- and it makes a better community. With bike lanes, you have complete streets -- and that completes the community."

Part of the effort involved amping up participation in the annual Bike-to-Work Day by having riders register at ibikefresno.org. It resulted in nearly 1,000 bicyclists taking part in Wednesday's event - up from about 700 riders last year.

The campaign also involves commercials and promoting biking events, such as safety and repair, and connecting bikers to each other.

Eventually, the city wants to achieve a high rating by the League of American Bicyclists as a biker-friendly community. Cities such as Davis, Portland, Ore., and Boulder, Colo., are currently rated "platinum," the highest level for their efforts in education, encouragement, enforcement, evaluation and engineering.

Smith says getting the rating would help Fresno's reputation and could boost tourism. Biking magazines often direct readers to rated cities as vacation destinations.

Bryan Jones, city traffic engineer who oversees the bicycle master plan, says Fresno is a great place to bike because it is flat and the weather is just right -- similar to the geographical landscape and climate of Davis.

But changing cultures and attitudes won't be easy.

The main challenge is getting people to leave their cars at home and to participate. An effort to get locals to log a million bicycle miles collectively began May 1 as part of National Bike Month. As of Wednesday, just 72,381 miles were logged.

And some residents have already expressed concerns with major streets losing car lanes to make room for bike paths. They fear fewer lanes will result in more traffic congestion.

The master plan calls for steadily transforming the city's infrastructure over the next 20 years by increasing the miles of existing bike lanes and trails. There are currently 116 miles of bike lanes and 14 miles of bike trails. The proposal calls for 496 new miles of bike lanes, bringing the total to 612 miles, and 193 new miles of trails, for a total of 207 miles.

Recently, bike lanes were added on Dakota Avenue, from Blackstone Avenue east to Maple Avenue. Eventually, they will go all the way to the city limits at Peach Avenue. Maple Avenue, from Dakota to Shields avenues, also recently got bike lanes.

Victoria Rabago, who lives on Dakota Avenue, says the new bike lanes affect how she enters her driveway. "I'm very upset," she says. "It's hard now. You used to have two lanes to pull over. Now, when you slow down, cars are coming fast behind you. You just want to turn in, but you can't. Cars are honking at me while I'm just trying to turn into my own driveway."

Debbie Andrews, who attends Bethesda Apostolic Church on Dakota Avenue, says the bike lanes take away room previously needed by church members to enter the street from the parking lot. "It is a concern," she says. Jade Shorter says environmentalists may be happy with the new bike lanes but she isn't. She thinks bike lanes are unsafe. "I wouldn't ride my bike in a bike lane because I would be scared to get it," she says. Jones says the master plan's goal is to have complete streets -- not just for automobiles, but for bicyclists and pedestrians. "It gives people a choice of using bicycles or automobiles -- and doesn't give preference," he says.

The plan also provides resources to educate people on biking safety and traffic laws and on the values in bicycling. Jones believes bicycling leads to better health, improved air quality with fewer vehicles on the road and economical savings. "There also are a lot of people unemployed and strapped -- and biking is a lot more economical than using a car," Jones says.

Smith said biking groups have long advocated to city officials for improved biking conditions.

"It's no longer reminding them of infrastructure changes; there's a plan now," Smith says. He and other bikers have pushed for this for so long because bicycling changes the rider's attitude.

"You realize how great it is to be outside," says Byron Watkins, creative director with JP Marketing, which is behind the "I Bike Fresno" promotion, and an avid biker. "I feel better when I get to work. I'm not as tired. When you get home you feel you've accomplished something."

Bicyclist Randy Treece, one of 85 bikers from Cal Trans who participated in Bike-To-Work Day, was hopeful for more access to safe biking.

"We've got to the point there are too many cars on the road -- too much congestion," he says. "We need to look at alternative methods of transportation."

Obama signs order on emissions standards

Erica Werner, Ken Thomas, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Saturday, May 22, 2010

Washington -- President Obama has directed the government to set the first-ever mileage and pollution limits for big trucks and to tighten rules for future cars and SUVs, setting the nation's sights on vehicles that run on half the fuel they now use and give off half the pollution.

"The nation that leads in the clean energy economy will lead the global economy. And I want America to be that nation," Obama said Friday at the White House as he signed a memorandum that would reshape the nation's driving habits after he leaves office.

With the catastrophic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico underscoring the risks of America's heavy reliance on fossil fuels, Obama gave federal agencies just over a year to come up with fuel efficiency and greenhouse gas emission standards for commercial trucks and buses.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, commercial trucks account for 21 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation sector - compared with 33 percent for passenger cars and 29 percent for SUVs, pickups and minivans.

The new standards, to be issued in July of next year, would apply to big trucks and buses for model years 2014 through 2018.

At the same time, the EPA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration will get to work on stricter standards for cars and light trucks like SUVs to kick in with the 2017 model year and carry through 2025.

A year ago, Obama announced plans for the first federal regulations of fuel efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions in cars and light trucks, for the 2012 through 2016 model years. Those standards, outlined last month, aim for a fleet average of 35 1/2 miles per gallon by 2016, about 10 miles per gallon better than the current average.

Obama also asked the Department of Energy to work with carmakers and others to promote the development of advanced vehicles including plug-in hybrids and electric cars, and to give technical help to cities preparing for them.

Obama moved forward with Friday's announcement as a climate bill with much wider-ranging provisions awaited action in the Senate, its future uncertain. Obama can take significant steps on fuel efficiency without Congress.

The big truck industry has known for years that fuel efficiency regulations were coming. Clayton Boyce, vice president of the industry trade group American Trucking Association, said the industry supports fuel efficiency standards, but that the new plans could be controversial if the administration went too far.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Monday, May 24, 2010:](#)

Another view of ag burning

By Shirley Batchman and Manuel Cunha

The emissions from agricultural burning in the San Joaquin Valley air basin are 11.4% of the total emissions generated from all sources of burning. This portion is derived mainly from prescribed burns in the forest and smoke transport from wildfires in and outside the air basin.

During the past eight years, agricultural burning in the local air basin has been reduced by more than 80% and will continue to decrease as economics and technology allow. To state that agriculture has had a "free pass" is erroneous and does nothing more than fan negative political rhetoric.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's smoke management plan oversees burning allocations on a daily basis, based on meteorological conditions, to responsibly prevent air quality impacts. Any extensions granted to the current rule will not impact public health nor prevent the attainment of federal Clean Air Act emissions thresholds.

Economics were a major consideration in the extensions being considered in this rule. It is important to note that the source for the "voodoo economic" data that the senator referenced relative to commodity income and cost-per-acre to farm was the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the University of California Cooperative Extension, not industry-generated numbers.

The cost to remove designated orchards, vineyards and process nut prunings came from the chipping industry and documented costs that growers had incurred for previous work. To indicate that the numbers were fabricated by the industry or district is patently false.

Sen. Dean Florez is correct in stating that the biomass facilities within the San Joaquin Valley have the capacity to accept all agricultural wood. There is one major caveat. Only five biomass facilities are required to accept agricultural wood, per the terms of their air district operating permit, and the mandate is less than 50% of their total fuel buys. The remaining facilities chose not to be required to accept agricultural wood and purchased their air quality offsets from other sources when securing their operating permit.

Agriculture wood was not a preferred source for these plants. Historically, these facilities have purchased the majority of their fuel needs from the urban areas of the state, due to its lower cost, which is underwritten by the tipping fee at the urban dumping site.

Sen. Florez inserted four specific criteria into the legislation when he drafted SB 705, recognizing the challenges agriculture may face in meeting the timelines specified in the legislation.

Specifically, postponement of the dates by the district would be allowed if the following was met:

No economically feasible alternative to eliminating the waste.

No long-term federal or state funding commitment for the continued operation of biomass facilities which made their use viable.

The local air district determines that issuance of permits to burn will not cause or substantially contribute to a violation of federal ambient air quality standards.

The state Air Resources Board concurs with the district's determination.

These are worthy criteria, and the air district has well documented the first three items, and the state governing board will evaluate the request at their upcoming board meeting. To refer to the criteria as "loopholes" is nothing more than a reflection on the legislation he authored.

Production agriculture recognizes its role and responsibility in achieving clean air for all in the San Joaquin Valley. The industry has been an active participant on many fronts in this endeavor, whether it is replacing thousands of irrigation pumps, implementing conservation management plans to reduce particulate matter, such as dust, replacing agricultural diesel trucks or upgrading propane forklifts through retrofits or replacements.

Currently, the industry is in the process of rule development to replace off-road agricultural equipment, such as tractors. The agricultural community cares about the health of the valley and has faced the challenges of improving air quality at a significant financial cost.

These efforts should be recognized.

Shirley Batchman is director of Government Affairs for California Citrus Mutual. Manuel Cunha is president of the Nisei Farmers League.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Friday, May 21, 2010:](#)

Talk turns to air pollution and the Bay Area – again

By Mark Grossi

Take a stroll down the comment section in today's air quality story about farm-burning exemptions. And you'll find this ubiquitous Valley air issue.

Sometimes, it's like a "where's Waldo?" thing. You have to hunt a little, and sometimes it's not there. But in today's story, it's back.

Somebody says our problem is the Bay Area's pollution.

Well, the fact is that the Bay Area does contribute to the Valley's pollution. Sometimes it's a little, sometimes it's more.

I've talked with atmospheric scientists since the mid-1990s about this. It's not usually enough to create violations.

I'm not saying it's irrelevant, but the real problem here is capacity. We can't handle too much of a bad thing like pollution. It doesn't take much to push pollution past health thresholds here, mostly because we live in a bowl.

Now, if you really want to start an argument about pollution from other places, let's talk about truck traffic on Interstate 5 and Highway 99.

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Commentary, Saturday, May 22, 2010:](#)

Economic growth or environmental protection? It's not a simple question

By William Tweed

We celebrated the 40th anniversary of Earth Day last month, or at least some of us did. I think it is fair to say that Earth Day is not a big event in Tulare County, and in that fact there is an issue worth considering.

Few regions are more dependent upon a healthy environment than the Central Valley of California. Because we have an economy based on agriculture, the foundation of all our livelihoods rests upon nature.

Successful agriculture cannot occur unless we have healthy soils, clean air and reliable water supplies. And to one degree or another all of these have become problematic in our region.

Salt buildup, caused by irrigation of already mineralized soils, threatens a substantial portion of our agricultural land, and once it progresses beyond a certain point it can render soil unusable for farming.

We face even bigger problems when it comes to air quality. Our Valley tends to hold and concentrate both the pollutants we generate locally and those that drift into our valley from the Bay Area.

Estimates of resultant loss in agricultural productivity are huge, apparently exceeding a billion dollars over the last decade.

And as for water, well, we all know the truth in the old saying that "water is for fighting." Central California simply does not possess enough water to meet all our agricultural and urban demands unless we take it away from others who also want it and move it to our region at considerable expense.

So, it would seem, working to protect the long-term quality of our soils, air, and water supply should be the very highest priority for our community. But matters are not that simple. Indeed, organizations that lobby for these values often face strong and even bitter local criticism.

Sadly, Tulare County's U.S. Congressman Devin Nunes has become a vocal opponent of almost anything that implies any sort of environmental protection. All who care about the environment, he implies, are "radicals" who threaten the very survival of our society.

Such rhetoric, and many Tulare County residents espouse similar statements, reflect an approach that believes that there are no limits to natural systems and that the proper role of humans is to extract everything possible from the natural world. Also implied is a strong belief that the needs of the immediate moment take precedence over those of the future.

From this perspective, any effort that attempts to limit or manage human use of the natural resources upon which we all depend is seen as misguided and ultimately evil. Since in our society this management role falls mostly to government, government itself becomes an enemy of agriculture and economic growth.

In reality, of course, we cannot sustain what we have built here over the past 150 years without managing and yes, limiting, how we use resources. It does not make any sense, for example, to go on pumping far more water out of the ground than can be sustained. We're taking that water, and the economic opportunities it will support, away from our children and grandchildren.

Interestingly, I spent time recently in China. There, in a reversal of conditions here, the government itself concluded twenty-five years ago that economic growth needed to take precedence over any sort of environmental protection. And the results, I can assure you, will literally take your breath away.

China has air pollution that overwhelms daily life in almost unimaginable ways. For much of the year cities such as Shanghai and Beijing fester under clouds of coal smoke and auto exhaust that essentially obscure the sun. If you've spent time near a major forest fire, you get the idea.

At the same time, rivers are drying up and many areas find themselves without irrigation water. Huge numbers of people are abandoning farming to move to cities and look for manufacturing jobs.

In the name of economic progress, most major Chinese cities have become uninhabitable by American standards. Many pedestrians wear surgical masks to protect their lungs when they go outside of their tiny apartments. And they wear them every day.

Here in Tulare County many argue that environmental protection is wrong because it limits economic growth. Well I've seen the alternative, and it doesn't work. The unlimited pursuit of growth produces a world that no one who reads this column would want to see here. Visit China if you don't believe me.

The challenge we face, as with so many things, is to find a balance that not only meets the needs of this current moment but also of our descendents. And that, inevitably, involves coming to grips with the environmental limitations of our valley and our need to live and find ways to prosper within them.

Three Rivers resident William Tweed writes about the natural world of Tulare County.