

Biogas Project Raises Concerns in Pixley

By Julie Fernandez, staff writer

The Valley Voice, Thurs., June 16, 2011

Pixley - Supporters and opponents of a plan to build a biogas facility north of Pixley are expected to pack a special Pixley Town Council meeting Monday.

The 7 p.m. meeting at the Albert Dung Community Room adjacent to the sheriff's substation at 186 No. Pine St. was called late last week after the Tulare County Planning Commission delayed for two weeks a vote on whether to give Calgren Renewable Fuels LLC a special use permit to build the facility on the south side of Avenue 120 between Highway 99 and Road 120.

The facility, if approved, will extract methane gas from cow manure to power an ethanol plant.

The plan is opposed by California Dairies Inc. (CDI), which is located north of the proposed project, and 3R Land and Development LLC (Rhonda, Russell and Ralph Friend), which owns 150 acres adjacent and to the west.

Both companies have hired law firms to fight the project – which they praised but said belongs at another location – and are asking commissioners to require a full environmental impact study before voting.

Calgren, which produces ethanol on a site to the south, was solicited by the California Energy Commission and offered a \$4.67 million matching grant (Calgren would also pay \$4.67 million) to build the anaerobic digester and ancillary components, which would provide the company with renewable biogas for its operations while providing an alternate waste treatment method for dairy manure.

Planning commissioners postponed their vote after Pixley residents reported they became aware of the project only a few days before the June 8 public hearing.

"I did not have the slightest inkling of what was planned for Pixley," said Louise Rambo, who has lived in the community for nearly 70 years and is a member of the Town Council.

Betty Morehead, another Pixley community leader, said she is not opposed to renewable energy projects, but is concerned about potential offensive odors that prevailing winds would transport into the heart of the community of about 3,000 people.

"How can that not be on your radar?" Morehead asked, referring to the findings of an initial study and environmental review. "How could that be missed? I hope it was not deliberate."

In his response to written concerns about odors that CDI and 3R Land and Development sent to the county, environmental review consultant David Mitchell said: "Digesters are proven odor mitigation controls to reduce odor from dairy manure."

As for the uncovered mixing pit, holding tank, dewatering facility and storage area, Mitchell said the initial study and environmental review did not consider these to be "significant odor sources" and that is why discussion was limited in his report.

He also noted:

- The mixing pit and holding tank will contain fresh manure that has not undergone significant decomposition and will be processed rapidly, which "means odor-causing emissions are minimized."
- The mixing and agitation provided in the mixing pit to make the manure a consistent mixture provides oxygen to the manure, which slows anaerobic decomposition and reduces odors.
- Manure that will be pumped to the site from 4J Farms will be collected in a mixing pit at the dairy and agitated and mixed prior to sending.
- The manure volume will be steady so there will be no need to stockpile it at the project site.

Concluding the amount of odorous gasses produced is “expected to be minimal,” Mitchell said that does not require negative atmosphere buildings and bios rubbers or relocating the project to a different site as opponents suggested.

He reported the county is also requiring Calgren to prepare an Odor Mitigation Plan prior to beginning operations and that Calgren has agreed to place a cover over the manure holding tank “to provide further assurance the project will minimize odor emissions.”

Pixley residents are worried about an odor problem because of “a horrible stench” that came from the Sunkist plant years ago and which took a long time to resolve, Morehead said.

“People literally could not go outside their homes,” she said.

Manuel Azevedo, CEO of California Dairies, said his company operates a \$250 million plant with 120 people and cannot afford to have its milk jeopardized by odors and dust.

“A digester is a good thing, if it's put in a right spot,” Azevedo said.

Christopher Campbell, an attorney for CDI, said: “We agree this is a model project ... they will help clean up the air if it's done right.”

He urged commissioners to “slow it down so it can be done right.”

Calgren President Lyle J. Schlyer explained to the Planning Commission that the state Energy Commission, which has to award the grant by June 30, originally told him the project needed to have their approval by May 22 and then extended the deadline to June 8. He said Friday it has agreed to extend the deadline to after the Planning Commission's vote.

Schlyer said the project has “strong regulatory support” from the Energy Commission, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the water board. He expressed surprise at CDI's opposition.

He said his sense is they've fallen prey to what was described in another county as the “yuck factor,” even though CDI is surrounded by dairy farms with manure.

In his response to CDI concerns about manure spillage from trucks hauling manure to the site and making a turn from Avenue 120 to Road 120, Mitchell said manure has been hauled throughout Tulare County on public roads for many years and “staff is unaware of any incident that has resulted in a significant impact to health or to property.”

Elsewhere in the report he noted the milk processing site is adjacent to farmland where manure is actively applied to land and said it is also adjacent to a major freeway “subject to car fires, chemical spills, diesel toxic emissions and heavy metal road dust.”

“We are expected to believe that their dairy processing facility ... will be impacted by a minor odor source more than 1,500 feet downwind and separated by a freeway and railroad overpass from their facility,” he said.

Campbell, writing on behalf of CDI, said that because of the project's adverse effect on aesthetics, it could prevent the company's efforts to bring a cultured cheese production to its Tipton facility.

“Cultured cheese, like butter, is particularly affected by odors,” he said.

The mere proximity of the biogas facility to the cheese plant could negatively impact the project because it will “create the perception that there is an unacceptable risk of contamination, even before any contamination occurs,” he wrote.

CDI also raised concerns about manure entering the storm water basin and possible contamination of drinking water wells.

Central Valley coal power plant to convert to biomass

Central Valley Business News, Wednesday, June 15, 2011

DTE Energy Services Inc. (NYSE: DTE) says it's gotten the go ahead from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to convert a dormant coal-fired power plant at the Port of Stockton to operate on biomass fuel.

The conversion will employ approximately 100 construction workers at its peak. Approximately 50 employees and contract personnel will be needed to operate and maintain the plant when the conversion is complete. In addition, the project will create more than 100 additional jobs through agreements with fuel suppliers and other companies that will provide services to the plant, says DTE.

"We are excited to move this project forward," says Steve Sorrentino, DTE vice president. "The plant conversion to biomass energy advances DTE Energy's commitment to green energy. It will ensure a reliable source of energy with state-of-the art-technologies to preserve the environment. Most importantly, the project will bring hundreds of jobs to the Stockton area."

The plant, known as the Port of Stockton District Energy Facility (POSDEF), will be converted to burn 100 percent biomass fuel, primarily wood fuel derived from urban wood waste, tree trimmings and agricultural residues. It will produce about 45 megawatts of power.

DTE has completed a similar biomass conversion in Cassville, Wis. and has another under way in Bakersfield. The company also operates biomass power plants in Woodland, in the Central Valley, and in Mobile, Ala.

POSDEF began operation in 1989 as a coal-fired power plant and ceased operation in April 2009. DTE purchased the plant in June 2010 with plans to convert it. During the construction phase, DTE will replace the boiler and employ the best available control technologies to minimize air emissions, it says.

Following the conversion, the plant will provide power to PG&E under a long-term renewable power purchase agreement. The plant will help PG&E meet California's 33-percent renewable power requirement.

DTE, headquartered in Ann Arbor, Mich., acquires, develops, builds, owns and operates projects for large, energy-intensive industrial customers. The company is a subsidiary of DTE Energy, the largest subsidiary of which is Detroit Edison, with about 2.1 million power customers in southeastern Michigan.

DTE Energy Receives Approval to Convert Northern California Coal Plant to Biomass

By DTE Energy

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, June 15, 2011

DTE Energy Services, Inc., (DTEES) recently received approval from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to convert an existing coal-fired power plant at the Port of Stockton to operate on biomass fuel.

The plant, known as the Port of Stockton District Energy Facility (POSDEF), will be converted to burn 100 percent biomass fuel, primarily wood fuel derived from urban wood waste, tree trimmings and agricultural residues. It will produce about 45 megawatts of power.

DTEES has completed a similar biomass conversion in Cassville, Wis. and has another under way in Bakersfield, Calif. The company also operates biomass power plants in Woodland, Calif. and Mobile, Ala.

"We are excited to move this project forward," said Steve Sorrentino, Vice President, DTEES. "The plant conversion to biomass energy advances DTE Energy's commitment to green energy. It will ensure a reliable source of energy with state-of-the art-technologies to preserve the environment. Most importantly, the project will bring hundreds of jobs to the Stockton area."

The conversion will employ approximately 100 construction workers at its peak. Approximately 50 employees and contract personnel will be needed to operate and maintain the plant when the

conversion is complete. In addition, the project will create more than 100 additional jobs through agreements with fuel suppliers and other companies that will provide services to the plant.

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Following the conversion, the plant will provide power to PG&E under a long-term renewable power purchase agreement. The plant will help PG&E meet California's 33-percent renewable power requirement.

DTEES will continue to identify additional coal-to-biomass conversion opportunities nationwide as it works to meet its goal of investing \$1 billion into green energy projects.

DTEES, headquartered in Ann Arbor, Mich., acquires, develops, builds, owns and operates projects for large, energy-intensive industrial customers. The company is a subsidiary of DTE Energy, a diversified energy company involved in the development and management of energy-related businesses and services nationwide, with operations in 26 states.