

New ag burn plan good for farmers, air

By Tim Moran

Modesto Bee

Wednesday, May 19, 2004

Monday marked the first day of a new agriculture burning program that air pollution officials say will benefit farmers and air quality in the San Joaquin Valley.

Farmers will be able to burn ag waste more easily and frequently, and the air will not be inundated with smoke from the fires, according to Anthony Presto, public education representative for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The new system divides the district into 103 zones. Using data from climate monitoring systems, a meteorologist forecasts conditions in each zone, and a computer program determines how much burning can take place in each zone on a particular day.

Here is how it works: A farmer calls in for a burning permit, and the computer decides if the air quality in the farmer's zone is adequate for what the farmer intends to burn that day.

If the permit is denied, the farmer is put on a list for the next available burn day in that zone.

Under the old system, there were three zones: north valley, south valley and foothills.

Under the old system, a no-burn designation in any part of a zone would keep everyone from burning. When a burn day finally came along, everyone lit fires, choking the air with smoke.

The farm industry is cautiously optimistic about the new system.

"We're hoping it's going to work," said Wayne Zipser, executive manager of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau. "We're hoping it's going to make it

easier to call in (for a permit) and make more burn days available for farmers."

Gordon Heinrich, an almond and walnut grower in the Modesto area, agreed.

"It seems like it will help," he said, adding that since it's not the pruning and burning season, farmers haven't had a chance to try it. "They seem like they are willing to work with us. We will have to go through a pruning season to evaluate it," Heinrich said.

Farmers are more concerned about a new law that will ban ag burning altogether by the year 2010. A phase-out of burning is due to begin next year, starting with a ban on open-field burning of stubble from field crops, fruit prunings and weed abatement.

By 2010, all agricultural open-field burning will be prohibited, except in the case of diseased crops and hazard reduction burning in the foothills and mountain areas.

Heinrich said he shredded 70 percent of his orchard prunings last year, but a total ban would be difficult.

"Ag is getting the brunt of this because we are easy targets," he said. "It really worries me; it's getting tougher and tougher to farm. We have to give technology a chance to catch up."

That technology is in the form of biomass-to-energy plants that convert farm waste to electricity, Presto said. Other options are chipping and mulching, to create other commercial products.

The California Energy Commission has allocated money to provide incentives for biomass plants, Presto said.

Zipser said he hopes a compromise can be worked out before a total ban takes place.

"It's virtually impossible not to have some type of burning," he said.

Cyclists peddle a cleaner way to work

The Bakersfield Californian

Wednesday, May 19, 2004

By MATT WEISER, Californian staff writer

Riding a bike to work is something most people don't think about. It's so much easier to jump in the car, then drive to the gym after work.

But a growing number of Bakersfield residents are realizing they can get to work and get their gym workout at the same time.

"I actually do feel that I get some significant exercise by jumping on a bike four times a week," said Terry O'Sullivan, who rides his bike to work at Aera Energy on Ming Avenue. "And when I get to work, I always get a better space in the parking lot than anybody else."

There are a lot of other good reasons to try biking, and annual Bike to Work Day, celebrated Thursday, aims to bring that point home.

One of the best reasons is to reduce air pollution. Bakersfield has the third-worst air quality in the nation, according to the American Lung Association, and the main cause is motor vehicles, which account for 60 percent of the region's air pollution.

O'Sullivan said he feels that his biking habit makes a difference in fighting smog.

So does John Lotze, who commutes 20 miles round-trip between work and home almost every day. In the morning, to avoid arriving at work sweaty, he takes a Golden Empire Transit bus part of the way, using the bike rack that's attached to every GET bus. Then he bikes all the way home in the evening.

"My sense is that it's growing, and the gas prices will probably make it grow even more," said Lotze, who works for the Girl Scouts Joshua Tree Council. "I know personally of probably a dozen different people who ride to work most of the time."

The Kern Council of Governments recently launched an advertising campaign urging all residents to park their cars one day a week and use another form of transit, whether that is biking, public transit or carpooling.

"The basic problem comes when each of us starts our vehicle in the morning," said Ron Brummett, KernCOG executive director. "The catalytic converter takes awhile to warm up and begin working, so those gases from our engines go straight out into the air. So by not starting your car one day a week, you're essentially eliminating that amount of emissions."

Lotze, a board member of the local bicycling club Kern Wheelmen, has these suggestions for anyone planning to begin a regular bike commute:

- Scout a safe route in advance. Then try it out on a weekend day, when traffic will be lighter, to figure travel time and look for hazards.
- If you have things you need only at work, such as dress shoes or a bike lock, leave them at work so you don't have to carry them on the bike.
- Wear brightly colored clothing, if possible, and a helmet.
- Remember that bicyclists have the same rights and responsibilities as motorists.

Lotze rides to work for another reason: He said it sets a good example for his children, ages 9 and 11.

"I feel like I'm making a difference. I just wish more people would do it and make more of a difference," he said.

"My feeling is we can't let someone else solve the problem. We have to solve the problem ourselves. One guy pedaling his bike to work is a small thing, but it's all those small things that add up to make a big difference."

Valley air quality workshops to start next week

The Bakersfield Californian
Tuesday, May 18, 2004

Workshops to assist San Joaquin Valley growers with new air quality reporting and permitting regulations will be held throughout the valley May 25 through June 10.

The free workshops will address compliance rules for on-farm practices for PM 10 emission reductions and new permitting requirements from the passage last year of California legislation, SB 700.

In Kern County, workshops will be held June 8, 8 a.m., UC Cooperative Extension in Bakersfield and 4 p.m., Veteran's Hall in Wasco. For more information or to RSVP, call 397-9635.

Air quality workshops

Brief in the Modesto Bee
Wednesday, May 19, 2004

Workshops to assist farmers with new air quality reporting and permitting requirements will be held this month and next in the San Joaquin Valley. The workshops are free and will include sessions at 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Tuesday at the San Joaquin County Farm Bureau in Stockton; 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. May 26 at the Stanislaus Fairgrounds in Turlock; 8 a.m. June 3 at the Los Banos Fairgrounds in Los Banos; and 4 p.m. June 3 at the University of California Cooperative Extension Service Office in Merced. To reserve a space, call the appropriate county farm bureau office.

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Wednesday, May 19](#)

Reasons, incentives to bike to work Thursday

The promoters of Bike to Work Day, which is Thursday, have all sorts of reasonable arguments on their side: Bike riding is good exercise, and it reduces traffic congestion and air pollution.

Then there are the enticements -- free T-shirts for the first 125 downtown workers who arrive at Tenth Street Place and a continental breakfast for all who arrive before 8:30 a.m.

There's another practical reason to bike -- saving money. Gasoline is edging toward \$2.40 a gallon; there's talk of it reaching \$3 this summer. Bicycle commuters can burn 400 to 600 calories an hour to get where they're going, but no gas.

Saturday is the Family Cycling Festival in downtown Modesto. It opens at 8 a.m. with the serious racers in the Criterium and continues with bicycle-oriented activities for all ages. To learn more, see www.modestogov.com/etd/ride/.

[Fresno Bee commentary, May 15, 2004:](#)

Come join us: Ride your bicycle to work on May 21

By John Richau
(Updated Saturday, May 15, 2004, 5:45 AM)

Recent efforts to politicize the placement of bike lanes on our streets, which in themselves are only a measure to ensure safety for cyclists, is an affront to good planning and civic responsibility. Wrong-headed. And not in the interests of our neighborhoods.

Several issues beg scrutiny before we judge bike lane planning. Cars are great at what they do -- moving goods and people over long distances in relative comfort and freedom. They are also very expensive and polluting and extremely destructive, of the countryside and of living things.

A fair share

There are alternatives that we seem to have lost the ability to consider. However, we can have the best of all transportation modes if we plan intelligently. I admit, not everyone should be on a bike, but there should be accommodation for all modes. And each should pay its fair share of the costs.

Because we are so used to driving, we have come to accept the tremendous toll of traffic related injuries and fatalities, more than any war, natural disaster or act of terrorism. I doubt many of us think about this; we simply accept the risks blindly. We have also destroyed a great part of our natural heritage -- open space, plant life and animals misguided enough to wander across our paved right of ways. Though sad, again we've come to accept this condition without a lot of thought. But aren't there some corners of America we'd like to see protected and kept wild, or at least reasonably natural, some places we'd just rather not hear the roar of traffic?

We usually group air pollution with another health hazard, driving, but it's also very expensive, costing taxpayers annually (tens of billions in federal highway bills) and in more time spent sick or at the doctor's offices. Obesity also is directly related to our mode of getting around at least as much as our diet. Do you know anyone who gets in his car to go a block to visit a friend?

We also don't think about the other expenses of driving much but it is the most subsidized commodity we own. Governments spend billions for road and freeway construction, maintenance and parking, for oil exploration in hostile countries, military action, for health problems associated with accidents and pollution and for the trucking industry. In fact, it looks a lot like the old Soviet-style planned economy where prices are set by the government -- in our case, it is done through subsidization.

Cyclists pay

It's good to remember that cyclists and joggers pay the same costs because most them are also taxpayers and consumers and car owners. Even if you don't own a car, you're still taxed to subsidize motor vehicle use, through payroll taxes, so it's logical that mass transit be subsidized also and bike lanes built at government expense.

It is wrong to blindly and devotedly give everything to the motor vehicle interests and to those who think cycling is somehow fringe or "anti-business." Half of the business equation is the consumer. If you make it easier to shop by all modes of transportation, especially from the local neighborhood, you increase your sales and help the community.

It seems to me that we are all responsible for the critical air pollution problem facing Fresno. Cycling is totally nonpolluting, healthy, very inexpensive, highly efficient and helps neighborhoods and the community by making them more friendly and slowing the traffic.

Ever notice that when cities or developers want to show how sparkling their new communities are, they often show photos of smiling families -- on bikes? It's one way to stay healthy and protect our environment. Did you know it's also a lot more interesting getting around on a bike?

For cyclists, it's quite simple: Bike lanes make cycling safer. Efforts in the Fresno City Council to label bike lanes as "anti-business," as Fresno City Council Member Mike Dages has done, do not help either business interests or transportation or pollution concerns. They only serve to raise the level of agitation when discussing new bike lanes. It is far better to find ways to work together on these intractable problems than call people names and politicize the process.

I call on all Fresnans to speak out and ride out May 21 for the Third Annual Fresno County Bike to Work Week Ride. Many local elected and administrative officials will meet at 8 a.m. at Manchester Mall and head for Kern Street Coffee Company downtown with the media and local folks like you.

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, May 18, 2004:](#)

Blind to science

(Updated Tuesday, May 18, 2004, 6:13 AM)

There are those who believe and either ignore, reject or distort any finding that disfavors the beliefs. Others use evidence and fact to build belief, subject to change in the face of contrary evidence. The latter is the defining hallmark of science. Good, solid science has given us reason enough to have serious concerns about the overall health of the planet and its ability to sustain its myriad, interconnected life forms.

Jim Patterson's May 10 screed reads pretty much like some sectarian thesis critical of apostates. It is filled with fundamentalist language and imagery, distortions and questionable assertions. Among the most egregious are frequent references to the alleged misuse of science to serve the ends of the high priests of the new religion (ecology) he has detected in our midst.

If Mr. Patterson had the vaguest understanding of the science behind concerns about air quality, availability of fresh water, soil erosion, desertification, climate change, oceanic pollution, decline in fisheries, forest management, oil exploration, species loss and the impact of human population growth, he'd not think that "soulless" and inedible creatures are of no consequence. He might even consider the possible relationships between gas hogs on the road, air pollution and the unfolding catastrophe in the Middle East.

If he understood how science works he might research the credentials of mysterious organizations with resounding names such as Pacific Research Institute and American Enterprise Institute before quoting statistics of questionable validity and relevance.

Richard Haas, Professor Emeritus, Biology
California State University, Fresno

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, May 18, 2004](#)

'Evil straw man'

(Updated Tuesday, May 18, 2004, 6:13 AM)

Ex-mayor Jim Patterson creates a straw man when he complained in the May 10 Bee about "a new religion in town." To give his fearsome environmental straw man body, he gives it all the characteristics of a real religion, "complete with articles of faith, a dogma at war with science and a new-age inquisition. ... "

Mr. Patterson continues with the parallels between his evil straw man, the environmentalist, and (presumably) his own personal sect, the assumption being, I guess, that there is only room enough in town for one religion. Then he proceeds to tell us "the gospel truth about our ecology."

I guess it's because our rivers no longer catch fire, and indeed, environmentalists have been successful in many areas, that he implies there are no more real problems. He cites improved air quality, impervious to the fact that every year Fresno's gets worse. He cites clean water, ignoring that more than a dozen of our own municipal wells have been closed because they are polluted.

And as proof of how sweet the environment now is, he cites the American Enterprise Institute. This is the same gang that opposes zoning of any kind, and is even against mandatory municipal sewage hookups.

Imagine the world that implies. Outhouses and McDonald's or a factory right next door. If Jim Patterson finds that world respectable, then he should continue with his anti-environmental crusades.

Doug Bashford
Fresno

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, May 19, 2004:](#)

Missing the point

(Updated Wednesday, May 19, 2004, 6:26 AM)

The May 12 letter, "More people mean more cars and more pollution," made quite a rudimentary statement. So many people seem to want to blame everyone else about how bad the pollution problem is in our Valley, but nobody seems to want to do anything to resolve it.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, people sit on freeways for hours to get home each day because they have opted to be no-growth cities. The counties and cities refuse to build bigger freeways or approve even small housing projects.

Either way, if we stop growth from coming to our city, we will complain there are no jobs and not enough housing and people will still move here -- and now there are four cars in every driveway because no one can afford to buy a house.

Until people start walking, taking public transportation and actually caring about our air we will be in the same situation. Calling people who want to bring growth to our Valley "dunderheads" is wrong. These people are creating many things that are needed to make our city as great as it is. That includes new people and developments.

Stephanie Y. Rohrer, Fresno