

Cows willing, but power flow slow

By Eric Stern, Bee Capitol Bureau
Modesto Bee, Thurs., Aug. 12, 2004

SACRAMENTO -- During the 2001 state energy shortage, lawmakers passed a \$10 million emergency measure to convert methane-packed manure from dairy farms into electricity.

But three years later, only two of the 14 approved projects are up and running -- and that was only in recent months, according to testimony presented Wednesday at a state Senate hearing. In fact, \$2.8 million in unused funds was returned to the state.

It wasn't for a lack of interest.

"We have a number of projects that are right on the cusp," said Mike Marsh, chief executive officer of the Modesto-based Western United Dairymen, which helped administer the state grants.

Dairy farmers and biogas operators complained Wednesday of a sluggish response from utility companies to connect dairies to the energy grid. The hearing was a joint session of the Senate Select Committee on Air Quality in the Central Valley and the Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications Committee.

"They don't really support other people in the business," said Mark Moser of RCM Digesters.

He took aim at Pacific Gas & Electric Co. for creating a "dysfunctional" system of red tape that led to long and ongoing delays for dairies still trying to tap into cow power.

"I can't get straight answers out of them," Moser said.

Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, called the hearing to accelerate the projects and criticized utilities for a "cavalier" approach to the biogas concept.

John Busterud, senior environmental counsel for PG&E, responded that his company "strongly supports" methane digesters as an alternative energy source. But he acknowledged, "We have room for improvement in the area of hookups."

Carl Morris, general manager of Joseph Gallo Farms in Atwater, told the committee that a company dairy has been generating manure-based power for the past three weeks -- about eight months behind schedule.

He said it took 16 months of talks with PG&E for approval.

"It's time-consuming and costly," he said.

The state awarded Gallo Farms a \$600,000 grant to pay for 50 percent of the project, although cost overruns put Gallo's share closer to 75 percent, Morris said.

"We went way over budget," he said.

Though start-up costs are high, cow power can translate into huge savings: One cow equals two light bulbs, energy experts say. A covered manure lagoon at the Gallo dairy now provides 25 percent of the energy needed to run a cheese production plant, Morris said.

Morris said he was anxious to get the methane digester operational. With the delays, he said the farm was losing \$1,000 a day in potential savings.

Florez said he will hold a similar hearing next year to check on the progress of other dairies trying to set up biogas systems.

Shaver Lake smog raises concerns

Sierra community's air issues considered in plan.

By Mark Grossi
The Fresno Bee, Thurs., August 12, 2004

At more than 5,000 feet up in the Sierra where eagles nest and pine trees flourish, Shaver Lake has a smog problem.

The blue-sky mountain community surprisingly landed among eight places in murky Central California where smog violations raised concerns between 2001 and 2003.

Bad air from the Fresno-Clovis area and other cities apparently floats up to Shaver Lake.

"The real estate ads may say you can get above the smog there," said Don Hunsaker, plan development supervisor for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "That's not necessarily true."

The revelation comes as part of the district's new plan to clean up smog or ozone. Today and Friday, the district will tell the public how the plan will make the air safer by 2010. Officials aim to knock down the area's highest ozone readings -- the ones that exceed the so-called one-hour federal health standard. By this measure, the Valley is among the three dirtiest places in the country, with Houston and Los Angeles being the other two.

Ozone is a corrosive gas that can damage the lungs, skin and eyes. It can trigger asthma, bronchitis and other breathing problems.

In recent years, the Valley's highest ozone readings have shifted from Kern County to Fresno County. Arvin and Edison in Kern still have many violations, but the six other areas of concern are in Fresno County. They include Parlier, Clovis, three Fresno locations and Shaver Lake.

Increased traffic in the Fresno-Clovis area, with more than 500,000 residents, appears to be the cause of the problem.

From 2001 to 2003, Shaver Lake had four violations, which is the lowest total of the eight places. But during the same period, there was only one violation in Bakersfield, a city of 280,000 people.

Why did Shaver Lake, with a population of about 700, have more violations than Bakersfield?

After pollution drifts up to Shaver Lake, it can build up overnight, officials explained. Meanwhile in bigger cities, emissions from traffic after dark actually destroy ozone, reducing the smog level. There is little evening traffic in Shaver Lake, they said.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks have the same type of problem, officials added.

"You just don't have fresh emissions up there," said Evan Shipp, district supervising meteorologist.

The key for Shaver Lake and the other seven locations is to control pollution from many sources in the Valley, officials said.

They propose everything from tighter controls on wineries to fees for housing developments on the edge of town, from which residents drive farther and create more pollution.

New state and federal standards for diesel fuel and engines by 2007 are expected to trim pollution as well.

The district also will investigate unconventional solutions. One idea would designate Interstate 5 as the sole truck route through the Valley, reducing pollution on congested Highway 99 near the area's largest cities.

The cleanup plan also comes with a twist. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is scheduled to revoke the one-hour standard next June, relying on a more protective, daylong standard for ozone.

Environmentalists and others are preparing lawsuits to stop the agency from abolishing the old standard.

They believe both old and new standards should be enforced. If the old one is revoked, air district officials said they are ready.

"All control measures in the one-hour plan would be used to meet the new standard," Hunsaker said.

Fresno Sierra Club member Kevin Hall said he fears freeway construction and development east of Fresno will outrun new air controls. More traffic and congestion will mean more pollution, he said.

"The development assures we'll never get to attainment," he said. "The new freeways are like huge exhaust pipes."

Dairy proposal met with resistance

Visalia operation would milk 3,000 cows upwind of subdivision.

By Diwata Fonte

The Fresno Bee, Aug. 12, 2004

VISALIA -- Bill and Kim Marone wanted to live in Visalia so much that Bill camped two days last summer in his white Astro van outside a developer's office.

They wanted to buy one of the first lots offered at Centex Homes' Shannon Ranch subdivision in north Visalia because of its school district, nearby lakes and affordability.

It wasn't until the couple moved in, however, that they learned the true value of location, location, location.

Their new home is three miles downwind of the proposed Mineral King Dairy, which plans to milk more than 3,000 Holstein cows and house more than 5,000 animals.

The Marones were among a handful of neighbors trying to sway Tulare County planners against the project at a meeting Wednesday. The proposed dairy was before the Planning Commission to get final certification of its environmental impact report, and a special-use permit to build the dairy. But in light of neighbors' comments, the commission delayed a decision on the project until next month. It plans to consider the dairy again at 10 a.m. Sept. 8.

The operation, which would be west of Road 108, between Avenues 336 and 352, is slated to cover 156 acres on a 1,648-acre parcel owned by Jay te Velde.

Many of the neighbors at the meeting repeated the concerns of dust, flies and odors that they had laid out at previous meetings.

"I realize we're just a small piece of the puzzle, but we're an important piece of the puzzle," Kim Marone told the Planning Commission as she held a petition signed by about 25 neighbors.

About two dozen dairies are within 10 miles of the Mineral King Dairy, and about a handful of the dairies are about the same size as Mineral King would be, according to Roberto Brady, project review division manager for the county's Resource Management Agency. The county requires that dairies be a half-mile apart.

Mineral King operator Neil Zwart defended the project at Wednesday's meeting, emphasizing that the dairy plans to be a good neighbor and add jobs.

Zwart said he plans to plant a buffer of trees, improve Road 108 and submit annual reports on dust, odors and flies. He also stressed the air-quality and water-quality courses he took through the University of California at Davis Cooperative Extension and the high health-inspection scores he received at a dairy he operates in Kingsburg.

Dairies became a touchy issue in 2000 when the Center for Race, Poverty, and the Environment sued Tulare County over its regulations, saying they were not stringent enough. The county and the group settled the lawsuit in 2001.

About 70 new dairy and dairy expansion projects are backlogged in the county, Brady said. Despite the delays, Tulare County was the nation's top milk-producing region in 2003.

Mercury continues to climb in the Valley

Latest heat wave should begin to break this weekend

By Patricia Jiayi Ho, Staff writer
Tulare Advance-Register, Thurs., Aug. 12, 2004

A ridge of high air pressure is at the root of hot weather this week, according to National Weather Service meteorologist Kevin Durfee. The forecast for today is 101 degrees and triple-digits are expected through Friday.

"It's providing dry, warm weather," Durfee said, adding that the ridge makes it difficult for clouds and precipitation to form.

If the mercury rises above 102 today, it will also make it the hottest day so far this summer. On Tuesday, the high in Tulare was 101 degrees. Highest temperatures during the day usually occur about 5 p.m. for the summer, Durfee said.

Residents sought relief wherever they could.

Juanita Rodriguez, 43, brought her children, ages 7 months to 10 years old, to the Visalia library "to feel the cool air" inside the air-conditioned building.

"We drink lots of water and eat a lot of ice cream," Rodriguez said. She dressed her children in shorts to keep them cool.

As an in-home care provider for the elderly, Rodriguez also takes precautions when it gets hot. She makes sure her clients drink plenty of water and brings an ice chest with bottled water when she drives them to appointments.

The Ragsdale family ducked inside Baskin Robbins in downtown Visalia for ice cream.

"We never get used to it, but we forget how miserable it can be," said Lorie Ragsdale, 42, who was born and raised in Dinuba.

The couple make a point to put sunblock on their girls, ages 5 and 9, if they play outside. It's also a good idea to wear light clothing, sandals, hats and sunglasses, said her husband, David, 40, an electrical engineer technician.

Residents can look forward to giving their air conditioners a break next week, Durfee said.

"The weather system that's affecting now is going to weaken," he said.

"Temperatures are still going to be above normal through the weekend. Starting Sunday or Monday, temperatures will return back to normal."

"Normal" weather for summer is highs of around 96 and 97 degrees, Durfee said. Monsoonal weather moving up from Mexico will help to abate the heat because humidity helps clouds to form.

"High clouds may be enough to dim the sun a little bit and keep the atmosphere from warming up as quickly as it has been."

Today has also been declared a Spare the Air Day in Tulare County.

Keeping cool

The American Heart Association offers the following tips for staying healthy this summer:

- Drink lots of water before undertaking any vigorous physical activity.
- When out in the heat, wear light, comfortable clothing.
- Rest in a cool place and drink water if you exercise in the heat and begin to feel dizzy, nauseated or thirsty. Seek medical attention if symptoms continue or worsen.

Dairies vs. development

A proposed dairy near Shannon Ranch has homeowners and dairy owners upset and asking ... Where is the breaking point?

By Laura Florez, Staff writer
Visalia Times-Delta, Thursday, Aug. 12, 2004

Bill and Kim Marone searched far and wide for a nice place to live in Tulare County before settling on Shannon Ranch, a new development on the outskirts of northwest Visalia.

But what the couple said they didn't know when they bought their home was that a dairy was also trying to move into the neighborhood -- an area some say is already saturated with dairies.

"We cannot understand why this dairy has to be located so close to our homes," Kim Marone told Tulare County planning commissioners Wednesday during a public hearing on the proposed dairy.

If approved, the Mineral King Dairy would set up shop with 5,625 head of cattle three miles away from Shannon Ranch, where 1,400 single-family homes are planned.

And although Neil Zwart, a co-applicant of the project, says he is trying to "be a good neighbor," not everyone is happy about the prospect of another dairy moving into the neighborhood.

They talk about more [dust](#), more flies, effects on groundwater and more traffic, which some say will worsen road conditions in the area.

Although commissioners said some of those concerns they heard Wednesday were repetitive, they voted to close public testimony on the matter and continue their public hearing so county staff could address concerns in writing.

The Marones aren't the only ones complaining.

Other dairy operators, including Floyd and Gail Kampen, who live a half-mile downwind from the proposed site, say there isn't room for more dairies.

They say they've counted 36 dairies within a five-mile radius of the proposed Mineral King Dairy.

"Where are you going to cap off the new dairies coming into a dairy saturated area?" Gail Kampen asked. "We're in dairy overload here."

Tulare County has about 315 active dairies and about 70 applications for new ones and expansions on file, said Roberto Brady, project review division manager for the Resource Management Agency.

But people have always wondered about Tulare County's dairy breaking point.

"It's kind of always been a concern," Brady said, noting that eight new dairies have started in Tulare County since 1999, when the county was sued for its dairy permitting process. "When you reach the point when you shouldn't have any more depends on what aspect you're looking at."

An ordinance adopted by the county in 2000 said dairies within the county must be separated by a half-mile, project planner Mohammad Khorsand said.

Chan Wilcox of Three Rivers asked commissioners Wednesday to consider a process like the one in Kern County, where Wasco residents will in November get the chance to let county supervisors know how they feel about dairies within 10 miles of city limits.

And it's not just dairies that seem to be the problem; it's encroaching development, too, dairyman Floyd Kampen said.

"It's just kind of magnifying the problems with the city getting closer," he said.

When he started his dairy 32 years ago, developments like Shannon Ranch weren't nearby. But now, his dairy is only three miles from the city limits.

"What about growth? If they keep building and building out there, [we're] too close to city limits," he said. "Developments are coming closer."

Cliff Ronk, director of forward planning for Centex Homes, said if the proposed dairy were closer to Shannon Ranch, sales representatives would feel compelled to tell potential homebuyers.

"If it were a half-mile away, it would probably be a concern," he said. But at the time the development was initially being built, the dairy "wasn't on the radar."

Shannon Ranch, when finished, will take up about 600 acres. About 400 acres will be devoted to residential homes, and the remaining 200 acres will consist of multiple-family, commercial, school and church properties. A total of 1,400 single-family homes are planned.

It will extend east from Demaree Street to Dinuba Boulevard and generally be bordered on the north by Pratt Avenue and Riverway Drive.

Ronk said disclosures are generally made about projects when they are within two miles of the residential development. In some instances, projects of significance -- such as a prison or an airport -- will be disclosed even if they are farther than two miles.

He said even though Centex is not required to disclose the potential dairy to buyers, it may do it now.

"One thing to remember is we live right in the middle of agricultural areas, and one thing Centex tries to do is balance residential development with ag uses, but it isn't always easy," he said.

Staff writer Melinda Morales contributed to this report.

Clean-Air Promise

[Letter to the Times](#)

Los Angeles Times, August 12, 2004

Re " 'Reform' Imperils a Force for Clean Air," Opinion, Aug. 8: Marc Haefele's criticism of a proposal by the California Performance Review panel to abolish the state Air Resources Board is on target. However, he wrongly attributes to me a quote terming the proposal a "gubernatorial power grab." In fact, it reflects a grab for power by polluting industries. The governor has not adopted the panel's ill-conceived proposal, which would do away with one of the most effective environmental boards in the nation.

To the contrary, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has pledged to cut California's air pollution by half by 2010. I fully expect the governor to reject this shortsighted recommendation and instead to retain the ARB, whose leadership has been so vital to California's battle for clean air.

Gail Ruderman Feuer
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Santa Monica