

## **Dairies await estimates on cow pollution**

### **Most believe the current figures are overstated.**

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Tuesday, April 5, 2005

With the \$4 billion dairy industry and environmentalists watching, an advisory group will take center stage next week in the emotional argument over how much smog can be blamed on cows.

Under a lawsuit settlement, the Dairy Permitting Advisory Group must come up with a suggested revision to estimate dairy air pollution, which several researchers now say the state has significantly overstated.

The problem: A key researcher won't know until the end of summer how much pollution the animals create. Advisory group members will meet next week and work out a recommendation after hearing presentations from four researchers in the past several weeks.

"We'll take what we do know and talk about it," said group member J.P. Cativiela, representing Community Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship, a dairy advocacy group.

A University of California scientist Monday told the advisory group that he needed more time for analysis. UC Davis researcher Frank Mitloehner studied cows and their waste in isolated chambers. "We have tried to measure the most important compounds," Mitloehner said. "But you can't say something about what you haven't measured. We can't stand here and tell you a number."

Current state estimates show cows in the San Joaquin Valley produce about as much smog-making compounds, called reactive organic gas, as cars.

The issue looms large in the 25,000-square-mile Valley, stretching from Stockton to Bakersfield, which has recorded more daylong smog violations than any other place in the country since 1999.

The Valley also has a burgeoning dairy industry, led by the No.1 dairy county in the nation, Tulare County. Dairy owners believe they have been unfairly branded by the media, saying the current estimates are flawed.

Few people now believe the estimate, which relies on a 1938 study focused on the wrong kind of gas. In January, Mitloehner said his preliminary results indicated that cows might emit only half the current estimate.

Now, after a lot of media attention, Mitloehner doesn't want to even mention a number: "It needs to be peer-reviewed."

Three other researchers have discussed their analysis with the advisory group. Group members said an independent environmental consultant, C.E. Schmidt, last month reported a dramatically lower emission rate — perhaps 85% lower than the current state figure.

But the work has not been checked by other academics or formally published, one environmentalist said.

"How defensible and valid are these conclusions?" asked dairy critic Brent Newell, lawyer for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

The advisory group, however, cannot wait until the end of summer. The settlement of a lawsuit between the dairy industry and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District obligates the group to come up with a recommendation by April 15.

Several different interests are represented in the group, including dairy, health, academics, environmentalists, the air district and community activists.

## **Rebate for trading gas lawn mowers?**

By Jason Campbell

Manteca Bulletin Tues., April 5, 2005

RIPON -- Getting rid of that old gas lawnmower might not only help your lungs -- it might even help your wallet.

On Tuesday, the Ripon City Council will discuss the possibility of implementing a rebate system for residents who agree to turn their two-stroke gas-powered machines -- including weed-eaters and edgers -- for something more eco-friendly .

Sponsored by Vice-Mayor Dan Prince -- who currently serves on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control Board -- the program is still in the rough planning stages.

Prince has become the voice on the Ripon Council committed to doing what's necessary to ensure that the air pollution guidelines set by the Federal Government are met by 2008.

"A lot of people don't realize how serious and pressing of an issue this really is" said Prince, who serves on the panel that addresses air pollution from San Joaquin County all the way down to the start of the Los Angeles basin. "It's important that we do what we can to reach those standards -- or it could have disastrous effects."

And Prince isn't just talking about the lack of quality of air.

Billions of dollars in Federal transportation funds could be withheld from local governments if standards are not met, and fines for companies violating those standards could double.

During a roundtable discussion several weeks ago with Congressman Richard Pombo, Prince asked what the City could do to take the steps necessary to alleviate the problem -- bringing the concern to the table for the House Resource Committee Chair.

And it isn't the first time he's advocated the program. During a previous term while serving as Mayor, Prince sponsored a measure similar to the one currently being addressed which allowed residents to take their old gas mowers to Schemper's ACE Hardware and receive a discount on a Black and Decker electric lawnmower.

But unlike last time, Prince wants to open the door to other lawn manicuring tools as well, and possibly even set aside as much as \$20,000 to make it a permanent budget item that can be allocated yearly.

"Two-stroke motors are the biggest source of pollution -- and people don't realize that," Prince said. "The last time this was a real successful program, and I hope that it will be something that residents take advantage of."

He is also planning on taking the issue to the League of California cities upcoming conference and is hoping to have a separate workshop to help spread the idea among Central Valley communities.

## **Bad Weather Has Almond Growers On Edge**

By Mitchell C. Naylor

Oakdale Leader, Tues., April 5, 2005

Hummer days. That's a big thing in the almond industry. The Central Valley almond industry would love to have had a hummer day on Feb. 15, 2005. But it didn't.

"That's when you get on the tractor and you can hear the bees in the field," said Mel Machado, describing a "hummer day" to a full room at the Gene Bianchi Community Center on Thursday, March 24. This was the 32 Annual Oakdale Chamber of Commerce District Ag Scholarship Luncheon and Trade Show.

Machado, field representative for Blue Diamond Almond Growers of Modesto -the valley's largest specialty agriculture crop- said that some forecasters are predicting a billion-pound production

year in 2005, and some farmers have committed their crops at \$3 a pound. But there is no for-sure prediction for the year's production level.

That's because on Feb. 15 -at the high point of the almond crop bloom when pollination takes place for two weeks each year- there was a "cutoff low" weather formation hovering over the Central Valley of California. It cast clouds on the entire area and threw off rain that knocked blooms from the trees.

"There is no physical, scientific, way to predict a cutoff low," said Machado of the weather phenomenon. "That low sat off the coast of California for 15 days," he said, citing a forecaster from outside the U.S. who, on that day, was predicting a 100 percent bloom.

But, according to the field rep, who has been with Blue Diamond since 1992 where he assists members with cultural and business decisions required in the management of their crops, there is no such thing as a 100 percent bloom. Sixty percent is considered ideal.

"Everybody wants to see bees in the field," Machado told the crowd who came to enjoy a beef and chicken barbecue lunch, participate in a silent auction and help out the Oakdale Chamber scholarship program. Last year, proceeds supported two scholarships, along with agricultural projects at Oakdale High School and the junior high school.

Bees in the field and blooms on the tree were scarce this year during the critical window of time. "There are going to be some issues," said Machado.

"Almonds are a crop that is pollinated by bees," he said. "If you could design the little buggers in the lab, we would make it so that the bloom would not take place in January." He pointed out that almonds are a very unstable crop because they are so dependent upon the weather and bees, and yet, California is the largest almond producer in the U.S., and almonds are the largest export specialty crop for America.

The perfect production year, Machado noted among a number of charts and figures that he presented at the event, was 2002. Weather was perfect, and it was, indeed, a "hummer" year. That year the industry produced 1 billion 800 million pounds of almonds.

So what, he asked rhetorically, is the industry expecting this year. His answer: "All sorts of positions are being taken right now. There are a whole bunch of growers who are polarized right now."

What he did say, though, was that the industry has to produce more than a billion pounds of almonds in order to have a decent year. If the outcome is 900 million or less, there will be problems.

"All the signs point to a good year right now," said Machado, but he noted that on Feb. 15, the ground under the trees in orchards was covered with blooms from a rain. From his own observations, he didn't feel he could make a firm prediction, but he did make statistical comparisons showing that similar weather conditions had not been disastrous in the past.

In addition to discussing the crop production year and the sheer difficulty of getting a crop, given the nature of the business, Machado talked about the future of almonds in the valley, and the types of almond products available to consumers. He also discussed agricultural issues confronting the industry.

For instance, the industry has spent a billion dollars during the past two years to develop new methods to deal with some of the [environmental issues](#) raised by the increasing growth of residential areas in the valley. Some of these include low dust harvesters and a move to shredding most of the tree debris, as well as new water conservation methods.

Water, he pointed out, is always an issue. "We need new water sources, period. We need to develop a water infrastructure, or we are headed for bad times.

Machado also talked about the nature of co-ops, and said there are more than 600 different items made from almonds. He discussed the ways that almonds are marketed today, and expressed the opinion that "commodification" of the crop has caused pressures within the industry that are counter to the nature of the crop, creating demands that cannot always be filled.

"Almonds are a big crop," said the Blue Diamond field rep in conclusion. "It's a specialty crop. And it's a very strong force in California."

Machado was born in Turlock and raised in Livingston where he grew up on a small dairy farm. He attended Merced College and California State University, Fresno, where he graduated with a BS degree in Plant Production and Vegetable Crops. He married Christine in 1998, has taught part-time at Merced College and served as farm coordinator for the Merced College crop production program until taking his position with Blue Diamond.

A dozen local agri-business companies put on displays at Thursday's Ag Trade Show, and there were 19 different local businesses that provided donations and served as VIP sponsors for the event. The Oakdale High School FFA members volunteered as food servers for the event.

[Viewpoints, Bakersfield Californian, April 5, 2005](#)

## **Kern can stop Southland's sludge invasion**

By Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter

It all started off innocently enough. A Northern California city had a sludge problem and was looking for the most cost-effective way of getting rid of it. Between 1958 and 1973, the city of Livermore touted the city's sewage sludge as a great fertilizer for gardens and landscapes, and offered it to residents for free.

Unbeknownst to residents who trusted city officials, the sludge is believed to have been contaminated by plutonium released from the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory into the city's sewer system.

In a small town in Pennsylvania, Antoinette and Russell Pennock thought the farm next to their home was innocently spreading cow manure on nearby fields. Not until their son, Daniel, died in 1995 of a massive bacterial infection did they realize that the farmer was spreading sewage sludge. Danny, 17, died from an infection he got after walking on land thick with sludge.

And in 2002, the family of Shayne Conner, a New Hampshire man who died in 1995 after being exposed to sludge, received an undisclosed settlement from a wrongful death lawsuit filed against Synagro Technologies. Synagro is the nation's largest sludge company and the parent of the South Kern Industrial Center that plans to build a sewage sludge-composting plant seven miles east of Taft.

Officials at Synagro claim that they settled out of concern for the victim's family and point to a statement that the family issued absolving sewage sludge as the cause of Shayne's death. Synagro officials later acknowledged that the company helped draft the statement and the Conner family signed it as a condition of the settlement.

Major health and environmental catastrophes start off innocently. First they tell us: Don't worry. It's safe. The science of the day can't prove that it's harmful.

Then people start getting sick, so we come up with new "safety" regulations. And finally when folks start to die, we're told that alternatives to cleaning up the mess will only cause worse damage so we just have to live with it and there is nothing that we can do about it.

Sound familiar? After years of allowing sanitation departments in Los Angeles and Orange counties to yearly dump over 450,000 tons of sewage waste on local farmland, we're told that we can't do anything about it. Never mind that the sewage sludge is spread over land above valuable water reserves.

Never mind that all it takes is one incident, one illness, one infection or one case of contamination of our groundwater for the market for all our valley crops to plummet and a quarantine to be imposed on us. Just look at what one case of mad cow disease did to the cattle and dairy industries around the world.

But what's most troubling about this situation is that it's simply not just the waste generators and haulers who are saying that we can't stop it. Unbelievably, it's our own elected county supervisors the folks who have the power to determine land use.

Twelve counties in California ban or effectively block the land application of sewage sludge. Why them and not us? Our county has too often innocently welcomed outside polluters. Rather than asking tough questions, putting forward tough public protection rules and being true conservatives with our land, they liberally fall on the side of the polluters claiming that we can't do anything about it.

It's time that our elected county officials stop acting so innocently. And it's time that we stop the culture of helplessness. What can county officials do immediately?

**\*\*First of all, they can support my legislation (Senate Bill 926) to ban the importation of sewage sludge across county lines. The proposed law says that each county needs to take care of its own sewage sludge.**

**\*\*Secondly they can pass an ordinance to simply ban the land application of sewage sludge. An opinion from the Legislature's legislative counsel says that it can be done.**

**\*\*And lastly, they can re-evaluate the conditional-use permit for the massive Synagro sewage composting plant slated for construction next to Taft. Holding a more publicized and public meeting on the permit and the company's plans would be a good start.**

Kern County has hung out the welcome mat to sludge peddlers for far too long. We've seen the deaths and the effects sludge is having in communities across our country. Simply saying that we can't stop it isn't good enough. If our supervisors are not ready to pull the welcome mat from the feet of the sludge peddlers, then they run the risk of having the mat pulled out from beneath their feet when the voters finally get their hands on the situation through the initiative process.

*Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, represents Kern County in the Legislature.*