

In the News, July 15, 2005

Some balk at blaming dairy cows for Valley air pollution

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

also in the Merced Sun-Star

Friday, July 15, 2005

Five university scientists say local air authorities could be making a major mistake in a new estimate that makes dairy cows the San Joaquin Valley's biggest source of one smog-making gas.

The scientists, most of whom worked on dairy air research, are not the only ones joining a challenge from the \$4 billion industry to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Five congressmen and 12 state legislators are pushing the district to reconsider the figure, which moves cows ahead of passenger cars as a source of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs.

The higher number means dairies are responsible for more pollution than the industry contends. More controls and expense will be necessary, industry officials believe. But critics say the public won't be served if regulators are chasing phantom pollution.

Assembly Member Barbara Matthews, D-Tracy, one of the state legislators to sign a letter asking for reconsideration, said she did not want to see heavy-handed regulation. "To go and spend time and money on something that could be quite harmful to the industry that in the long haul doesn't actually accomplish anything would be tragic," said Matthews, who chairs the Assembly Agriculture Committee.

The air district is expected to make its estimate final on Aug. 1, increasing the amount of VOCs from cow waste by more than 60% over the old estimate.

Officials stand by their number, which they proposed last month. But the estimate will change in the future as science evolves, officials said.

"The controversy is largely over a single piece of the VOC picture," said Dave Warner, district director of permit services. "Our estimate comes from the best available science. With further research, there is a very strong chance the number will go up."

Added David Crow, air pollution control officer for the district: "No one scientist has looked at the totality of the emissions. We're obligated to look at the science that covers all the detail, and we did a good job of it."

Environmental and health advocates, who believe the new number is actually too low, support the district's effort.

But the five university scientists say officials wrongly emphasize one poorly understood part of the emissions from the area's 1.3 million milking cows.

"Three-quarters of their estimate comes from something that we believe is a very minimal part of the picture," said Charles Krauter, a California State University, Fresno, scientist, one of the researchers involved in recent dairy studies. "The credibility of organizations will be questioned later on as new research comes in."

The district considered results and comments from Krauter's dairy research and several others. Other scientists challenging the district's estimate include University of California at Davis researchers Frank Mitloehner, Richard Higashi, Teresa Cassel and Deanne Meyer.

The issue has been contentious for years as officials have tried to regulate the growing dairy industry under air permit programs that have not applied to dairies before. The permits were required for large dairies in a 2003 law, Senate Bill 700.

Last year, the industry sued the district over the permits. The lawsuit was settled, with the district agreeing to update the old estimate, which had been established in 1938.

After hearing suggestions from an advisory group, the district last month announced it would raise the amount of pollution from 12.8 pounds per milking cow annually to 20.6 pounds.

About 75% of the new estimate is so-called volatile fatty acids, or VFAs, which are a gas produced from the cow's fermentation of food. More research will be done on VFAs in the next year, but Krauter says preliminary work makes scientists suspect the gas is not a big factor.

"What we're seeing just doesn't jibe with what the district is saying," Krauter said.

The district used existing laboratory studies done in England to help decide the amount of VFAs in the emissions. Legislators said the science would be defensible only if the research is done in California on actual dairies.

Assembly Member Mike Villines, R-Clovis, said the state Legislature should intervene if the air district does not follow sound science.

"We don't come in and micromanage and tell them what to do, but we do make sure they're following the correct process," Villines said.

He said he received 30 to 40 letters from constituents who believe the emission estimate is too high.

Villines and Matthews said they did not talk with air district officials before deciding to sign the letter.

Dairy lobbyist Michael Boccadoro said the outcry from scientists and lawmakers is giving weight to the industry's argument.

"It's clearly showing the air district staff is on the wrong path," Boccadoro said.

Assembly Member Juan Arambula, D-Fresno, and state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, did not sign the letter.

Arambula said he needed to research the issue further.

Florez wrote his own letter supporting the district's estimate. He carried the 2003 bill that removed the permit exemption for agricultural operations, including dairies.

The senator called the estimate a "reasonable reflection" of current research.

"I encourage you to use this emission factor in your final report," Florez wrote. "Your strong stance on the dairy emission factors will enable the Valley to take real and significant steps in improving the air quality in the Valley."

News from the San Joaquin Valley

Friday, July 15, 2005

Fresno, Calif. (AP) --

Scientists and politicians are joining dairy industry representatives in challenging Central Valley air regulator's assessment that dairies are the biggest source of smog-making gas in the area.

Five university researchers working on dairy pollution, five congressmen and 12 state legislators said the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District might be making a big mistake in saying cows produce more volatile organic compounds than cars. The compounds contribute to smog.

Last month, air regulators announced their new estimate of how much dairy cows contribute to the Central Valley's dirty air: 20.6 pound of smog precursor compounds per cow per year. There are 1.3 million milking cows in the eight-county region.

Representatives of the \$4 billion industry and their supporters are fighting the estimate. They're afraid it will mean more regulations, and more expenses. They also say the public won't be served by air regulators chasing pollution that doesn't exist.

"To go and spend time and money on something that could be quite harmful to the industry that in the long haul doesn't actually accomplish anything would be tragic," said Assembly Member Barbara Matthews, D-Tracy. Matthews chairs the Assembly Agriculture Committee.

But other lawmakers who have worked to pass legislation holding agriculture accountable for its share of air pollution stood by the air regulators' estimate.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, sent the district a letter calling their estimate a "reasonable reflection" of current research.

"I encourage you to use this emission factor in your final report," Florez wrote. "Your strong stance on the dairy emission factors will enable the Valley to take real and significant steps in improving the air quality in the Valley."

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has to come up with an official number by Aug. 1. Public comments on the issue are welcome until July 25.

High temps, stale air ahead

A few, easy steps can help Valley residents cope

By Shannon Darling, Staff writer

[Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, July 15, 2005](#)

The heat is here.

And it has brought its best friend - bad air.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a warning Thursday that air quality is expected to be unhealthful across the Valley today and Saturday.

In Tulare County, the Air Quality Index is expected to be 127, unhealthful for sensitive groups. So active children and adults, and people with asthma and other lung conditions should limit their outdoor activities between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., according to the air district. The AQI is expected to be its highest in Fresno County at 154 and portions of Kern County at 159.

"Reduce your impact and protect yourself," said Janelle Schneider, of the air district.

The temperature is expected to hit 104 today.

"Strong, high pressure is creating a lid over the region, resulting in stagnant conditions and preventing the air from mixing," said Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist for the Valley Air District in a release.

Winds are also keeping air stagnant. Winds have been recorded between calm and 8 miles per hour, slower than is typical this time of year, Ferreria said.

The air district also declared today and Saturday as Spare the Air days.

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- Avoid outdoor activities between noon and 6 p.m., when air quality is generally at its worse. While indoors, air conditioners act as good air filters, and in some cases, Aminian recommends buying indoor air filters.

- Drink plenty of fluids. Your lungs lose moisture quickly in hot weather.
- Try not to contribute to air pollution.
- Use a saline nose spray after being outdoors. You can purchase the spray or make your own by mixing 1/4 teaspoon of salt with 8 ounces of lukewarm water.

How to help

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District expects today's air to be unhealthful in all eight Central Valley counties and has declared a Spare the Air Day. Here is what you can do to help:

- Reduce vehicle miles by sharing rides, organizing trips to cut down on distance traveled and telecommuting or shopping on the Internet instead of driving.
- Don't top off the car's gas tank, because doing so interferes with air-pollution controls on the gas pumps.
- Avoid the use of aerosols, gas-powered lawn equipment, and oil-based paints and solvents.
- Bring your lunch to work.

Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Resources

- www.valleyair.org <<http://www.valleyair.org>>
- www.allergyone.com <<http://www.allergyone.com>>
- www.allergyinstitute.com <<http://www.allergyinstitute.com>>
- Air quality information is also available by phone at (800) 766-4463
- Daily forecasts can be found at www.VisaliaTimesDelta.com <<http://www.VisaliaTimesDelta.com>>

[Modesto Bee editorial, Friday, July 15, 2005:](#)

Our View: It's time for Valley to clear the air Summer months nearly unbearable in county but it's worse for our neighbors to the south

It's hot, it's summer and it's the San Joaquin Valley. Add up all these elements and that means smog in unhealthy proportions. Right here in Merced.

Triple-digit temperatures and the blazing summer sun combine to cook up prodigious amounts of smog in Merced County and other areas of the San Joaquin Valley, a troughlike area bounded by mountain ranges on the east, west and south.

This week we have had air quality alerts here. While Merced's air was considered unsafe for the elderly and asthmatics, Bakersfield's air was bad for everyone. Some of the Valley's bad air comes from the San Francisco Bay Area, part is generated right here and other portions naturally travel south. In the past few years, Valley residents have been facing some of the worst air quality in the nation.

Given this gloomy scenario, maybe it's time for Merced residents and their Valley counterparts to do something concrete to improve the air we breathe. A little cooperation from a lot of people could improve our situation markedly.

How is that possible?

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District declares "Spare the Air" days when air quality gets into riskier categories. Typically that happens about two dozen times a year in this region, some years much more than others. In a "Spare the Air" scenario, residents are asked to refrain from driving as much as they normally do; air district officials say more than half of our pollution comes from motor vehicles. While cars pollute less than they used to do, there are more vehicles than ever out there and that negates some of the potential clean air savings.

Can't we curtail some of our pleasure trips? Considering the high price of gasoline, leaving the car parked at home when the errand or outing isn't absolutely essential makes lots of sense during smoggy summer days. If nothing else, combine all the errands into one excursion rather than two or three. There are alternatives to driving, including shopping by phone or the Internet, taking public transit, walking or riding a bicycle.

While some restraint by motorists won't solve the problem entirely, it could have an impact on this area's poor air quality and that's something we should seriously consider.

