

## Running air alerts up the flagpole

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2005



Look, up on the flagpole, it's a brand-new banner: a green flag signifying a "healthy" air day in Stanislaus County. This particular flag went up Monday morning at Our Lady of Fatima School in Modesto, which, like other schools public and private in the county, is participating in a new air alert program initiated by the Asthma Coalition.

It aims to keep parents and children advised of unhealthy air conditions, particularly for students with asthma and allergies. The other flag colors are yellow, indicating "moderate," when the air is unhealthy for extremely sensitive people; orange, "unhealthy for sensitive groups"; and red, "unhealthy for everyone," with indoor activities to be made available for all students.

## Provider to sell cleaner-burning diesel

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2005

A local fuel seller announced Monday that it's offering cleaner-burning diesel. Fleet Card Fuels will begin selling ultra low sulfur diesel at Renegade Travel Center in Bakersfield, according to the company.

The special diesel could make big improvements in Kern County's abysmal air quality, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

About 60 percent of Kern County's air quality woes come from motor vehicle exhaust, district spokeswoman Brenda Turner said.

Normal diesel contains a sulfur level of 500 parts per million, but the special diesel contains only 15 parts per million, according to Fleet Card.

The special diesel undergoes extra refinement to reduce sulfur levels, according to Fleet Card.

The fuel could help reduce both particulate and ozone levels, Turner said.

The use of ultra low sulfur diesel will become mandatory in summer 2006, but Turner said some companies are using the fuel early.

## Public asked to share vision for city at events

**Vision 2020 seeks input on community growth plan's progress, where it should go**

By JOE MULLIN, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2005

Greater Bakersfield Vision 2020 begins a period of checkups on its 20-year plan for the community this evening at the University of La Verne.

It's the first of seven meetings that will be held between now and Oct. 1. The meetings' purpose is to gather public feedback on the progress of the plan, and determine its future course.

"If it's our future, it's our responsibility to participate in it," said Sheryl Barbich, president of Vision 2020.

While some of the action plan has been accomplished, said Barbich, there's much left to do in the coming 15 years.

Vision 2020 began as an outgrowth of summits on community development that were held by the Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce.

For residents who can't attend the community meetings, Vision 2020 is conducting an online survey asking residents to name their priorities to make the city better.

The survey asks about the importance of various strategies for economic and human development -- like building a creek downtown, [reducing air pollution](#) and creating curbside recycling.

The organization's Web site says the plan "involves all aspects of the community -- infrastructure, jobs, education, quality of life and the health of our residents."

## **Governor talks school buses during Stockton stop**

Hank Shaw - Capitol Bureau Chief  
Stockton Record, Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2005

STOCKTON -- Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger came to Stockton on Monday to highlight \$25 million in this year's budget to help take old, smog-belching school buses off the road.

Stockton Unified School District still uses 21 buses built before 1977 -- a key year for improvements to air emissions and safety -- as well as 52 built before 1990. Amador Unified has 13 of the disco-era buses.

Children riding these buses breathe fumes up to three times as toxic as those emitted from modern ones, and they're far more likely to be injured if the old buses crash.

"They're dinosaurs, and they ought to be extinct," Schwarzenegger said.

The event, held at Stockton Unified's bus yard, was the latest in a series of environment-related media events the Republican governor has held this year -- often coming on the heels of bad news.

Last week the Los Angeles Times reported that one of Schwarzenegger's former employers, American Media Inc., paid a woman who allegedly had an affair with him \$20,000 for exclusive rights to her story at the same time it was negotiating a multimillion dollar deal with Schwarzenegger to work for several fitness magazines owned by the firm.

Schwarzenegger said he did not know about American Media's deal with Gigi Goyette of Malibu and certainly did not know if it was hush money.

"Not that I know of," he said. "You'd have to ask them."

About 40 local union members protested the Stockton event. They say Schwarzenegger broke a promise to spend an extra \$3 billion on public schools with his budget this year. Schwarzenegger aides note that nearly half of the current \$117 billion budget already goes for public schools. California schools use nearly half of the nation's pre-1977 bus fleet. Ohio, Washington, Louisiana and Connecticut are other states with large numbers of such buses. Many states have none, such as most of the South, the upper Midwest, Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico.

California Air Resources Board chief Cindy Tuck said the \$25 million in bus money will be enough to junk 100 buses and retrofit 850 more built before 1987 to meet modern clean-air standards.

School districts will have to compete for the money, Tuck said, which should begin flowing next year.

State Sen. Chuck Poochigian, a Fresno Republican whose district includes parts of San Joaquin County, has sponsored legislation to extend the program beyond one year.

The bill is bottled up in committee, however, and needs help to clear the Democrat-controlled Legislature.

Getting a multiyear commitment to junk all 5,000 of California's substandard buses may prove difficult -- the price tag tops \$250 million. But Democrats are also touting this year's cash. Kern County Sen. Dean Florez highlighted the program in the Democratic Party's latest weekly radio address.

Schwarzenegger said Monday that he is throwing the weight of his office behind Poochigian's proposal.

"Whatever Pooch, does I will support it," Schwarzenegger said. The two could soon become ticket mates; Poochigian is running for state attorney general, and Schwarzenegger is expected to run for a full term next year.

## **Fresno-area growers air views on farm bill**

By Dennis Pollock -- Fresno Bee

Sacramento Bee, Saturday, Aug. 13, 2005

The tugging for money from the next multibillion-dollar federal farm bill is already underway, and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns got to hear a good share of it Friday in Fresno. Johanns said his role at the three-hour farm bill forum that drew more than 450 people to the Fresno Fairgrounds was to listen. And listening was mostly what he did, sitting on a dais as more than 50 participants stepped to microphones to call for a wide range of actions in shaping the legislation, which is more than two years away.

Several speakers said they want the bill to provide more for producers of specialty crops, such as fruits, vegetables and nuts, which make up the bulk of California's farm production.

"The bill must address specialty crop issues," said Tom Nassif, president of Western Growers in Irvine.

He said specialty crops account for 50 percent of the nation's farm values but their producers have not benefited greatly from past farm bills.

Other speakers asked for support to growers of specialty crops, including help in striking down trade barriers, and funding for research, marketing and pest exclusion. And they said the nation's new food pyramid, healthful eating and disease prevention programs bolster the argument for more assistance to specialty crop producers.

Some speakers said they want changes and beefed-up support for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program that shares costs of projects that farmers and ranchers often adopt to meet [air or water quality regulation](#).

"I would like to see the expansion of EQIP," said citrus grower Richard Moss of Ivanhoe, adding that a new position should be created for an [air quality director](#) with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Some wanted to be sure to keep funding for programs that help rural communities through Rural Development, a farm bill component that often receives less ink than crop subsidies.

Kim Pennington, battalion chief with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection-Fresno County Fire Department, talked of \$62,600 provided through Rural Development for equipment for emergency services.

And Mendota City Manager Gabriel Gonzalez said the agency provided a much-needed new waste treatment plant in the west Fresno County community.

While much of the discussion focused on nonprogram crops, some speakers said the existing safety net for program crops should remain in place.

"The structure of the farm bill should be maintained," said Don Cameron, who grows cotton and 15 other crops in Fresno County. "This would include current eligibility rules and payment limit provisions. The budget process should not be used as a vehicle for rewriting farm policy."

The Bush administration has proposed limiting individual annual farm subsidies.

Richard Molinar, a Fresno County small farms adviser with the University of California, urged more support for efforts to reach out to ethnically diverse farmers through such venues as the Small Farm Center at the University of California, Davis.

Johanns said it has not yet been decided whether a specific legislative proposal would emerge from the listening sessions. Fresno was the sixth location for sessions that will continue through the rest of the year and perhaps into next year.

The current farm bill runs through 2007, and Johanns said he would like to see action on a new bill by the first part of 2007: "We want to send a signal as to what the farm bill will be so that producers can make decisions."

Also on Friday, Tehama County, beset by \$4.5 million in crop losses after unruly spring weather, was designated a primary disaster area by Johanns.

The designation makes Tehama County farmers and those in the neighboring counties of Butte, Glenn, Mendocino, Plumas, Shasta and Trinity eligible for low-interest federal loans.

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2005](#)

### **Better numbers needed on emissions by dairies**

The issue isn't cars vs. cows. Farmers know that and so do environmentalists. The issue is dirty air, and how to clean it up.

Rising from waste lagoons, hovering over feed lots and emanating from both ends of the cows are a host of substances called volatile organic compounds. These VOCs — things like carbonyl, methanol and ethylamine — react with atmospheric gases to create low-lying ozone. This ozone is linked to asthma, which afflicts 157,000 children in our valley.

There is no question that cars and trucks create much more pollution, much of it deadly. As letters from readers, editorial cartoons and spokespersons have pointed out, we'd rather be locked in a garage with a cow than a running car. But cows create more VOCs, which contribute to long-term harmful effects.

Two months ago, an independent panel assembled by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control Board was required to specify the quantity of VOCs emitted by each of the valley's 2.5million cows. The panel looked at studies in five areas. In four of those areas, the information was gathered exclusively in California. But in the area of VOC emissions, the studies were literally from all over the map.

Industry studies put emissions at 5.6 pounds per cow; environmentalists said 38.2 pounds. A 1938 study put the number at 12.8 pounds. Facing a deadline, and knowing the proffered studies were flawed or biased, the board turned to studies from Great Britain and Texas, and settled on 19.3 pounds per cow.

The number is undoubtedly wrong. For instance, it's not even clear what's being measured. Scientists point out that much of a cow's emissions are made up of volatile fatty acids, or VFAs. One study puts that number at a half-pound per cow; another says 17 pounds. What quantity of VFAs does it take to hurt you? A University of California at Davis study says VFAs are relatively benign in making smog. If that's so, why regulate them?

The air board admits its figures are a moving target that will have to be adjusted; but the time is past for waiting on additional studies.

This year, the district will begin requiring permits for new dairies. Because no two dairies are the same, some dairies as large as 1,300 cows will not require permits, while others as small as 900 will. These are not the final numbers. In regulating other industries, the air board has made more than 500 adjustments.

Still, establishing any criteria is difficult. This is the transition stage, and farmers feel under attack. That much was clear at last week's town hall meeting in Modesto, when the California Environmental Protection Agency enlisted a panel of 15 experts and others to hear testimony and address valley concerns — such as bad air and burgeoning development. Three members of Gov. Schwarzenegger's Cabinet were there. Many of the exchanges they heard were quite emotional.

Whether or not environmentalists believe it, we do when Turlock dairyman Richard Bettencourt says, "We are more than willing to comply as best we can with reasonable regulations. But we're getting pushed out." One of Bettencourt's three sons suffers from asthma, but his worst fear is that none of his sons will be able to continue farming.

Whether or not farmers believe it, we do when environmental activist Maria Jaime says, "The answer has to be more aggressive action on all fronts."

We're glad the air board is taking action. But as we move from quantification to remediation, we must continue to develop more, and more meaningful, numbers.

Those whose livelihood depends on cows must be willing to help gather those numbers. Those whose lives depend on a cleaner environment — and that's all of us — must be more willing to listen than we are to argue.

Regulating cows alone won't clean up the air.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Editorial, Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2005:](#)

### **Doing something about energy**

Gas prices are getting to be like the weather: Everybody talks about the price of gas, but nobody does anything about it.

It's become more about what gas prices are doing to us. That became official in the results of an Associated Press poll last week that found two-thirds of those surveyed expect fuel costs will take a financial toll on them in the next few months.

Flip the coin, though, and there is another answer: Change behavior. Unlike the weather, gas prices are something that nearly everybody can do something about, at least in their own lives. They involve individual lifestyle choices - biking, car pools, public transportation - that might be difficult to embrace at first. But think of the gas you'll save.

We're not talking about those Internet-concocted, one-day gas-station boycotts that gain traction when gas prices hit a big spike. Using less gas might help your pocketbook, but it is not likely to drive down the price of a gallon of the stuff, which responds to complex market forces.

We're also not talking about the typical, opinion-page response: Write your congressman. We wouldn't discourage anyone from writing their congressman, but Washington talks about energy all the time, and rarely does anything about it.

This nation has been undergoing an energy crisis for almost 40 years, yet not a single president in that time has proposed the kind of energy program that, say, Kennedy declared for space, Johnson declared for racial equality or Reagan declared for defeating communism in Europe.

The energy bill President Bush signed last week increased subsidies for energy companies and fiddled with Daylight Savings Time. Not exactly a call to arms for a national war on energy dependence. Where were the visionary strategies like the hydrogen highway or photo-voltaic cells?

So what's a person to do, other than grumble at the pump?

There are alternatives, but they involve making lifestyle and behavior choices not everybody is comfortable with. Folks could drive less, for instance. There are all kinds of alternatives: walking,

taking public transportation, riding a bike, car-pooling, adjusting one's schedule. In most cases, there is an added benefit to this area that it will [spare the air](#).

And even if Washington is slow to react, local government need not be. Our cities and county can install some energy efficient policies and practices. Make streets legal for electric scooters. Install a bike-lane system (not random bike lanes here and there). Offer more public transportation options, like running the buses later. Keep pushing natural gas.

Everybody can make energy choices, every day in dozens of ways, from adjusting heat and lighting to food preparation. We don't all have to sit there and take it.

It would be nice if our nation's leaders had the vision to engage in a process of devising an overall energy policy, but they don't. Market forces will take over and call the shots in the coming energy wars.

In the meantime, though, individuals can fight their own battles against gas prices on their own turf. It won't bring down the price at the pump, but it could provide people with the personal satisfaction of cheating the devil.