

Nisei Farmers, Cotton Ginners May Build Central Valley's First Biodiesel Plant

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Facing regulations requiring cleaner burning diesel engines, two major farm advocates, Nisei Farm League and the California Cotton Ginners Association, have teamed up to apply for a federal Department of Energy grant to build the first major biodiesel plant in the central valley.

While efforts have been made to help farmers acquire cleaner running equipment, this is the first time a major local effort has been made to clean up the fuel used by farmers. Biodiesel is made from farm grown commodities like safflower and canola oil.

"I think we can replace some of the acreage lost to imports to growing our own fuel," suggests Nisei Farmer Manuel Cunha. There is also an opportunity in sugar beets to be converted to biofuel, he believes. Cunha says administrator at Cotton Ginners, Roger Isom, is helping put the plant concept together likely near Mendota at a tank plant there. Fresno County Board of Supervisors recently supported the grant application. Cunha says the plant site would likely blend biodiesel at a certain small percentage like 10% with regular diesel - a blend that could cut diesel emissions helping to clean the valley's air.

Isom told the Voice that they are in the process of crushing some cotton seed this summer to use on farm vehicles and that the cost of diesel fuel has made it economical to look at biodiesel. Interest in the bio-based fuel has skyrocketed this year with rising petroleum fuel costs and interest by the state and federal government in jump-starting the biodiesel industry in the US. Isom says the Navy may adopt the use of biodiesel in their vehicles as well meaning it's likely there will be increased demand not just from the farmers and truckers, but the military and other government vehicles.

Chevron Says No To Tulare Dairy Center

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Tulare - Chevron Oil Co. turned down a donation to the Tulare Technology Center this week according to Dr. Jim Cullor of the UC Veterinary Center in Tulare. "I'm very disappointed. They said we were not a right fit for their company."

The Bay Area based oil company was considering a donation to the project which is a 1000 cow instructional dairy planned at the UC Veterinary Center. The program has been in the works for several years - a joint venture of COS, Tulare High School and the University of California at Davis.

Led by UC Vet Center director Dr. Jim Cullor, local officials met with Chevron representatives last February to pitch the project in hopes of attracting funds to pay for an expected \$25 million price tag. That was the third meeting between Chevron and the project proponents.

This week in conference calls, Chevron indicated they saw some connection between dairy and biofuels but it was distant, says Dr. Cullor. In the past 6 months Bay Area based Chevron has made a number of investments in alternative energy. Research on energy from cow manure was one possible benefit the oil company could get from investing in a state-of-the-art research dairy. Key to the plan is construction of a nutrient management plant including a methane digester to convert waste to energy.

The big project has financial support of the area dairy industry but still lacks the funds to build the new facility. "We'll have to meet with our partners and come up with a strategy. We won't give up," says Cullor.

Ag Bag

Valley Voice Tues., June 13, 2006

A preliminary analysis of test results for airborne pesticides around Parlier carried out by the state Department of Pesticide Regulation from January through March shows none of 37 pesticides tested for showed only one had a concentration that exceeded health screening levels but the concentration was similar to those found in other areas of the state. DPR said chlorpyrifos was found most frequently but at just 12% of health screenings levels. The year long study is set to release results throughout the year to determine if residents of Parlier are exposed to pesticides in the air and if so in what amounts. The next report is due in October. The study was launched after critics said that the DPR was not doing enough to protect public health from pesticide drift.

In a related story the DPR is under the gun to cut pesticide use in the state by 20% by 2008 as a result of federal judge ruling and in recent days the agency's director Mary Ann Warmerdam says she is aware of complaints that the DPR "dragged our feet as air quality declined" in the state and she was committed to ending that history. The agency plans to focus on volatile organic compounds or VOCs that are part of the valley air problem. Farm advocate Manuel Cunha says Warmerdam doesn't seem to be aware that a big ozone study underway for the past few years is studying the problem of what pesticide VOCs contribute to our air problem.

Civil servants in China must do without

By ALEXA OLESEN, Associated Press Writer
in the Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, June 13, 2006

BEIJING (AP) - China ordered civil servants to do without cars, elevators and air conditioning Tuesday as part of an energy-saving awareness campaign.

The government targeted its employees with the one-day ban so that they could serve as an example to others, the official China Daily newspaper said, and because they use so much energy: the 7 million civil servants consume about 5 percent of the country's total electricity a year - equal to the amount consumed by 780 million farmers.

The order came on the heels of distressing news. China relies on coal for two-thirds of its energy needs, and pollution from generating plants and ill-regulated factories are fouling the air. In the past week, senior officials have warned that China's already degraded environment is deteriorating further and that targets to increase energy efficiency were in danger of slipping.

But the energy-saving day didn't prove popular. The China Daily said China's Cabinet, the State Council, gave the order, telling central government employees to leave their cars at home, to take stairs instead of elevators and to keep the air conditioning off.

When asked about the order and if officials were complying, the information office of the State Council refused to confirm the ban, referring queries to the National Development and Reform Commission, which develops energy policy. Commission officials did not respond to a request for details.

At the State Family Planning Commission, "a few hundred people" were following the directive, said Chen Bingshu in the agency's public affairs department. Some, she said, were climbing as many as seven flights of stairs to get to their offices.

But not Chen. She said she flouted the rules and drove her car to and from work because she needed to nurse her 6-month-old daughter at lunchtime and wanted to conserve time in the commute.

The conservation message seemingly did not even reach its natural constituency: the State Environmental Protection Administration. An officer in the public affairs department, who would only give his surname, Li, said no one had informed the agency about the campaign.

[Editorial in the Merced Sun-Star, June 13, 2006](#)

Our View: Working together we can help the air

One key aspect to keeping down smog in the Valley is finding ways to drive our cars less

We're entering a critical time of the year in Merced when everyone's help is needed -- to do their part in improving the chronically poor air we breathe.

The next four months are about the worst of the year for the San Joaquin Valley's air quality. But with the public's help, pollution problems can at least be minimized if not improved.

A wide number of factors contribute to air quality. One key aspect involves everyone driving less which reduces automotive emissions, a large source of San Joaquin Valley hazy skies. Carpooling, combining multiple errands into one excursion, bicycling or walking certainly are viable, even healthy options. Other things also have an impact such as limiting the use of charcoal lighter fuel and gas-powered lawn mowers and trimmers.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has the thankless task of monitoring and policing air quality as well as encouraging the populace to practice more responsible habits. When air quality is deemed unhealthy, Spare the Air Days are declared.

Thankfully if inexplicably, the number of Spare the Air Days has dropped in the last three years but we're not out of the woods yet. Three years ago the air was deemed unhealthy 37 times; this dropped to five days two years ago and 11 last year. Even a dozen bad days is entirely too many.

The Valley's businesses also can be a big help in the air pollution fight and more need to join the effort. About 700 area firms, including 30 in Merced, partner with the district on a number of fronts.

Not only should carpooling be encouraged but employees either can bring their lunch to work or have one person gather food orders for an entire office. Public transportation agencies, government fleets, farmers and manufacturers need to replace older, less efficient engines with less-polluting examples.

While air quality has a seemingly subtle or intangible element, its consequences are very real and the impact very serious. The San Joaquin Valley has the fifth worst ozone air pollution in the nation; poor breathing conditions cost area residents \$3 billion annually in medical bills, lost productivity and premature deaths.

We need to take these air pollution challenges seriously and do our part to improve our quality of life, one step at a time.