

Foster Farms planning expansion

But officials worry rendering plant could strain Livingston's resources

By Leslie Albrecht – Merced Sun-Star

In the Modesto Bee, Monday, May 8, 2006

LIVINGSTON - Foster Farms wants to expand its chicken rendering plant into a 24-hour operation that would boil 275 tons of poultry carcasses per day.

Some Livingston officials worry about the strain the new facility could put on the city's resources.

"(City) staff has grave concerns about the environmental impacts, so those will be scrutinized in depth," Community Development Director Donna Kenney said.

Air quality, water, traffic, and the effect on the city's industrial wastewater treatment plant top the list of concerns.

And then there's the odor.

Rendering plants boil animal carcasses and other "nonmarketable" animal parts such as blood, guts and bones. The process separates fat from protein. The fat, or tallow, is used in products such as soaps and candles. The protein finds new life as animal feed.

The other byproduct is a foul stench that residents near the Modesto Tallow Co. described as "nauseating" and "unbearable," according to The Modesto Bee. After a series of environmental violations, Modesto Tallow will close for good later this year.

Foster Farms is expanding its rendering operation in part to pick up the slack left by Modesto Tallow's closure, Foster Farms spokesman Tim Walsh said.

Walsh said he's not worried about the possible smell.

"We have always taken a great deal of pride in being a good neighbor to the communities where we do business," Walsh said. "We spend a lot of money making sure that the emissions from that facility meet or exceed air quality standards."

A modern rendering plant is a far less smelly proposition than a facility such as Modesto Tallow, said Dave Warner of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Modesto Tallow was built in 1917, long before the technology and environmental rules that reduced noxious emissions, Warner said.

"We're talking a night-and-day difference between a longstanding existing operation and a brand-new proposal," Warner said. "These guys will be held to a standard that doesn't allow them to be a nuisance."

"In any rendering plant, they'll have occasional problems that cause odors to leak out. Our job is to make sure that doesn't happen."

Foster Farms' new rendering plant could spew 100,000 pounds of air pollution into Livingston's skies yearly from a 70-foot smokestack, according to the application filed with the air district.

Some emissions to be curtailed

But most of that pollution will be carbon monoxide, which isn't a big concern in the San Joaquin Valley, Warner said. Foster Farms also plans to curtail its other emissions to compensate for the new pollution.

"It looks like a well-planned pollution abatement process," Warner said.

But he said the air district hasn't finished analyzing Foster Farms' plans yet, and the company won't get a permit to operate the plant until a thorough review is complete.

The air district has inspected Foster Farms' Livingston operation yearly since 1995, and the company never has received a violation notice.

That's an "impressive compliance record," air district spokeswoman Kelly Morphy said.

New waste-water plant in works

But water is another issue. Public Works Director Paul Creighton said he worries how the new rendering plant could strain Livingston's already-taxed industrial waste-water plant.

The Regional Water Quality Control Board cited Livingston in 2001 for not meeting clean water standards at its industrial treatment plant, Creighton said.

Since then, the city has been working with Foster Farms, the plant's only user, on plans to build a \$24 million treatment plant.

The new rendering facility will pump out 161,400 more gallons per day of waste water.

"We're not meeting the current water quality standards," Creighton said. "We'd have to seriously consider any additional flows to the (treatment plant). This is news to the city, and we're greatly concerned."

The rendering plant's demands on the freshwater supply are worrisome as well, Creighton said.

Foster Farms consumes 1.45 billion gallons of the 2.4 billion gallons Livingston pumps from its wells.

"We are at our max right now," Creighton said. "We're so tapped for water that we're forcing developers to put in wells.

"We're concerned that they're going to need additional water. But we were totally unaware of this."

Creighton and Kenney said it's sometimes difficult to get information about Foster Farms' plans.

Foster Farms gave the city a description of the new rendering facility, but the city wants more details, Kenney said, such as whether the new plant will generate extra truck traffic.

"They aren't very forthcoming with information," Kenney said. "We don't feel like we get the big picture."

Foster Farms told the city it wants the new rendering plant to be up and running by December. But before then, the city will do a study about potential environmental impacts.

Public hearings to be scheduled

The Planning Commission and the City Council must approve site plans and environmental documents, Kenney said.

The city will notify residents who live within 300 feet of Foster Farms' property line; the public will have a chance to comment at public hearings.

"City staff doesn't oppose anything (Foster Farms is) doing -- it's just the environmental concerns we're worried about," Creighton said. "We want to make sure we help our main industry in town.

"Some of our residents are third-generation employees out there. We hope in the future we can work better together instead of in this fragmented way that we are now."

Mariposa looks into turning trash to power

By Laura Cook

Merced Sun-Star, May 8, 2006

MARIPOSA -- The Board of Supervisors wants to divert the county's composted garbage into gas or energy.

The board decided at its meeting last week to have a Solid Waste Task Force approved by June, so its members can begin studying technology that could be added to the current composting facility, said Supervisor Bob Pickard.

The composting facility's grand opening was March 15, and the facility is expected to be operating within two weeks, according to Public Works Director Dana Hertfelder.

"We've had some setbacks with the weather in terms of finishing some of the work," he said.

Hertfelder said it's important that the county use a composting facility and begin considering technology that converts waste into a fuel source to reduce use of the county's landfill.

The task force will study whether or not it would benefit the county ecologically and economically to make the facility able to convert waste into energy.

"It could be possible to make this into a commercially viable composted material that can be marketed or sold," said Supervisor Bob Pickard.

Pickard, Hertfelder and Supervisor Lyle Turpin attended the Recent Emergency Technology Forum in Sacramento on April 17 and 18, where they learned the latest research and developments in waste management.

The forum, hosted by the California Integrated Waste Management Board, motivated supervisors to establish the task force.

"I've been encouraged by the different types of technology that are coming off the shelf that are becoming much more practical and reliable," said Pickard.

Proposed refinery expansion on schedule, employees told

BY RYAN SCHUSTER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, May 5, 2006

The proposed expansion of the Flying J refinery on Rosedale Highway remains on schedule, facility manager Gene Cotten told plant employees last week.

The Californian first reported in November that the estimated \$400 million project would double the refinery's gasoline and diesel production by increasing the amount of crude oil that the refiner convert to automotive fuel.

"This was just an update," Cotten said Thursday of the plans that recently received final approval from owner Flying J Inc. "We're moving forward with the project."

Ed Huhn, secretary and treasurer of the United Steelworkers Local 219 union, said the refinery's employees have been aware of Flying J's expansion plans for some time.

Cotten said the facility's capacity of 66,000 barrels of incoming crude oil per day will not change. But he said the expansion will more than double -- to at least 60,000 barrels a day -- the amount of gas and diesel fuel the refinery is able to produce once the project is complete, which could be as soon as mid 2008.

The expansion involves installing a fluid catalytic cracker to convert gas oils into lighter products like gasoline and diesel. This will reduce the amount of byproduct gas oils the plant currently sells to other refineries with such technology.

Cotten said construction could start by the end of the year if the permitting process goes as expected.

The expansion work is not expected to impact existing production levels.

Cotten said the expansion will create about 40 full-time jobs, bringing the refinery's total work force to between 250 and 260.

Huhn welcomed the addition of more jobs and the production of more clean-burning fuel.

"It would be new technology," Huhn said. "It should be safer, (with) less environmental problems and, hopefully, produce more gasoline, which would help (lower) gas prices."

Cotten added that the expansion would significantly increase the facility's profitability.

"It's a new era for the refinery," he said.

Owner Seeks to Expand Bakersfield Oil Refinery

By Elizabeth Douglass, staff writer
Los Angeles Times, Friday, May 5, 2006

With California fuel prices at record heights, Flying J Inc. has approved plans for a more than \$500-million expansion at its Bakersfield refinery that would double the plant's gasoline output as early as mid-2008.

The Ogden, Utah-based company, best known for its 178 truck stops, promised to increase the plant's production when it bought the refinery from Shell Oil Co. last year. Shell had planned to shutter the plant, saying it was inefficient and not profitable enough, but was pressured into selling it instead.

Plant manager Gene Cotten didn't return calls for comment Thursday, but he announced the milestone in internal meetings and an employee newsletter distributed this week.

"The Bakersfield refinery is set to embark on another evolution in the refinery's long history," Cotten said in the newsletter. "The clean fuels project ... has been given the final green light."

Flying J hopes to obtain permits from the likes of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District by the end of the year, Cotten said. Plans call for new equipment and upgrades that would increase the refinery's oil-processing capacity and squeeze significantly more gasoline from each barrel of crude.

The Bakersfield refinery, which processes as many as 68,000 barrels of oil per day, makes about 2% of California's gasoline supply and 6% of its diesel.

Cotten said he expected that the project would take 2 1/2 years to complete. Its cost will top \$500 million, said an employee who asked not to be named. That is almost four times the \$130 million Flying J reportedly paid Shell for the refinery.

The refinery purchase was a big step for privately owned Flying J, which also owns a tiny refinery in Utah.

Since taking over the Bakersfield refinery, Flying J has struggled through problems with crude oil supplies, labor friction and mechanical breakdowns.

However, California refiners such as Flying J have enjoyed record profits in the last two years as supplies have failed to keep pace with demand, helping to push up pump prices.

Fresno State touts research funding, benefits

By Christina Vance

The Fresno Bee, Friday, May 5, 2006

With more than twice as much money for research, California State University, Fresno has been able to bolster its curriculum and its academic reputation in recent years, officials said Thursday.

Donors have dished out more than \$180 million in research grants to Fresno State in the past five years, officials said. That's more than double the \$81 million obtained during the previous five-year period.

Thomas McClanahan, associate vice president for Research and Sponsored Programs, said research strengthens everything professors are trying to teach their students.

"Every time they spend an hour in a classroom, there are hundreds of hours of their own research behind that lecture," he said.

University officials called a news conference Thursday to discuss the increases in research dollars and ongoing projects.

Many of the research projects under way at Fresno State directly benefit residents of the Central Valley, officials said. Professors are studying health care, agriculture, job creation and education.

Criminology professor Barbara Owen said she has spent about 15 years studying gender issues in prison and crime. She has done some work at a Chowchilla women's prison, and her research has drawn the attention of wardens and activists who want to improve the correctional system.

Owen said she's trying to focus on the differences between men and women in the prison system. For instance, men sometimes throw body waste at correctional officers, but women typically throw water or cold coffee. Yet both actions receive the same level of punishment.

"All of you live in the world," Owen said Thursday. "You know men and women behave differently."

Professor Charles Krauter studies air pollution caused by dairy cows in hopes the research will eventually help the industry reduce emissions. Krauter and his researchers have taken upwind and downwind samples at two dairies in the Central Valley. Soon, they'll expand the research to include six dairies.

About half of the grants and contracts awarded to the university over the last five years came from state sources, according to Fresno State. Another 35% came from federal sources, and 12% came from private and miscellaneous sources.

Extreme Makeover, California Edition

Legislators place a \$116-billion package of public works projects on the November ballot.

By Jordan Rau and Nancy Vogel, staff writers

Los Angeles Times, Saturday, May 6, 2006

SACRAMENTO - California's packed roadways, flood-prone riverbanks, polluted ports, crammed schools and insufficient housing stock would receive the most extensive renovation and expansion in four decades under a \$116-billion public works proposal that the Legislature voted Friday to put before voters.

If the electorate approves the plan's core -- \$37.3 billion in new borrowing -- in the Nov. 7 general election, the state will make the most concerted investment in infrastructure since the 1960s. Then, under Gov. Pat Brown, California doubled its capacity to store water, laid thousands of miles of freeways and added campuses to the state's college and university system.

The spending would be focused less on growth than on accommodating the consequences of California's extensive development over a generation. State officials said that as early as next year, some of the money could jump-start already planned projects, including upgrades to 479 bridges and widening of freeways.

"We've made a major down payment on 40 years of neglect of California's infrastructure, which is really the foundation for both our economy and our educational system," said Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata (D-Oakland).

Months of negotiations in the Capitol ended early Friday morning with an election-year package that gives Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and legislators literally a concrete accomplishment that could help lift their dismal public approval ratings. Schwarzenegger and Democratic legislative leaders plan to fly to Los Angeles, Orange County, Oakland and San Diego on Monday to trumpet the package.

For all the fanfare, the deal could also be a new strain on the state budget for the next 30 years. If voters approve the package of four general-obligation bond measures, within a decade the state would have to pay as much as \$2.5 billion annually toward the debt. Should California face another fiscal crisis, the burden -- along with other changes lawmakers approved to protect gas tax money from any use besides transportation -- could put a substantial squeeze on school operations and healthcare programs.

Schwarzenegger and legislative leaders heralded the deal as a refutation of the Capitol's reputation as myopic and paralyzed. Republican lawmakers, who held veto power over the plan because their votes were needed to reach the two-thirds majority required to place a measure on the ballot, reluctantly signed on after winning concessions on how the money would be spent.

"We've proved all the naysayers wrong," said Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez (D-Los Angeles).

The first stab at a deal dissolved in March, and legislators were able to resurrect it only by excluding Schwarzenegger from the negotiations.

Until the votes were taken early Friday, it was not clear the measures would pass. Negotiators had to add \$2 billion for levees and county roads to secure support.

"A lot of people got to the edge of the pool, but they couldn't bring themselves to jump in," Perata said. "So some jumped, some were pushed."

The political stakes were high, and several lawmakers felt immediate repercussions from their votes.

A few hours after Assemblyman Juan Arambula (D-Fresno) refused to support the bonds because they lacked funds for new reservoirs for his agricultural district, Nuñez told him he would be moved to a cramped office known by some legislative staffers as "the doghouse."

The abode's current inhabitant, Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee (R-San Luis Obispo), will get Arambula's more spacious office. Blakeslee was one of 15 Republicans to vote for the flood protection bond. In an indication of Schwarzenegger's reduced influence on the Legislature after his special election defeat last year, the final borrowing package is substantially different from the \$68-billion proposal that Schwarzenegger announced in January.

Cut nearly in half, the version that will go before voters does not include money for jails or courts or for above-ground water storage, one of the GOP's most important goals. Key components of the package bear the imprint of the Democrats who lead the Legislature -- and who first proposed the idea of a public works package last year.

Still, Schwarzenegger embraced the package Friday, noting that because of the state's booming population, "we're really bursting at the seams everywhere we look."

"Of course it's not easy to do those things," he said about the deal, speaking at a school outside Sacramento. "We worked very hard since January.... And finally yesterday it happened."

At the moment, there appears to be no substantial opposition with the resources to oppose the ballot measures. A coalition of contractors and unions is already pouring money into funds to promote the package. Even Jonathan Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Assn., which typically opposes government borrowing, credited lawmakers for reducing the size of the package and said that, "although these proposals are not perfect, we're not going to write them off automatically."

The largest of the bonds would allot \$20 billion to transportation projects, with \$2 billion to widen roads used by commercial traffic to deliver goods from California's ports. Los Angeles County would receive at least \$1.9 billion, including \$1 billion for public transit such as buses, Metrolink and the subway system.

"Lots of money could come to us that wouldn't be available for a long, long time," said Roger Soble, chief executive of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

San Bernardino County expects to receive funds to help widen the 215 and 10 interstates and Interstate 15 over Cajon Pass, while Orange County would probably direct the money to improving all its major freeways. Riverside County wants to relieve congestion on the Riverside Freeway, Interstate 15 and Interstate 215.

Statewide public transportation would get a \$4-billion infusion of cash, and for the first time \$1 billion would go toward purchasing equipment to protect the state's transportation nexus from natural and man-made disasters.

Lawmakers directed \$100 million to improve security at the ports, which many terrorism experts consider the weakest link in California's borders. They also allotted \$1 billion to improve the ports' air quality.

"In a region that's so critical to not only goods movement but [as a] population center of the state, we should get our fair share," said Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. "I'm happy to say that the Legislature understood and heard."

The transportation bond is unprecedented in modern state history. The last time Californians approved borrowing for transit needs was in 1990, with a comparatively meager \$3 billion for rails.

As a result, road projects have started and halted with the sputter of a dying transmission, based on how much money officials allotted each year.

The California Transportation Commission warned in its annual report this year that "California's state transportation program is in shambles, the victim of five years of neglect and abuse."

A second bond would raise \$10.4 billion for schools. Of that, \$5.2 billion would pay for new buildings and an overhaul of dilapidated old ones, with \$1 billion to relieve overcrowding.

Substantial pots of money are reserved for small high schools, technical educational facilities and charter schools. The state's universities and community colleges would receive \$3 billion.

Still, the education spending would be half of what Schwarzenegger says the state needs.

The third bond allots \$4.1 billion to shore up the levees that prevent flooding along Northern California rivers and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Many of the levees are no longer reliable, endangering farms and new housing developments.

The final bond would devote \$2.8 billion to affordable housing, including money to build multifamily units for renters and living quarters for farmworkers and homeless youths. The bond provides \$1.2 billion in incentives for developers to build housing in inner cities and near public transportation in an effort to deal with sprawl.

That bond was the hardest sell to Republicans, especially after Democrats refused to approve the water storage projects they championed.

"Most of our guys don't like subsidized housing," said Senate Republican leader Dick Ackerman of Irvine, proudly noting that their pressure forced Democrats to remove rental subsidies and funds for homeless shelters.

Road show

The largest portion of bond money subject to voter approval in November, about \$20 billion, would be dedicated to transportation, including:

\$4.5 billion to ease highway congestion

\$1 billion to improve California 99 in the Central Valley

\$2 billion to ease the movement of goods to and from ports and airports

\$1 billion to reduce air pollution on major trade routes

\$100 million for security at ports and harbors

\$200 million to reduce school bus exhaust

\$4 billion for bus, light rail and other public transit systems

\$1 billion for transit safety and disaster response planning

Times staff writers Evan Halper, Peter Nicholas, Dan Weikel, Duke Helfand and Joel Rubin contributed to this report.

Central Florida tries to develop regional growth model

By Kelli Kennedy, ASSOCIATED PRESS

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Saturday, April 29, 2006

ORLANDO, Fla. - Leaders in burgeoning central Florida are crossing municipal lines to prevent what they see down the road: sprawl, overcrowded schools, traffic congestion, a shortage of affordable housing and few recreational areas.

Their answer, still in the works, is a growth blueprint for the next 50 years, with the hope that the area's seven counties and 86 cities will follow its pattern.

It is the nation's latest metropolitan area to bring together a host of different governments -- each with their own concerns -- to work toward one goal: manageable growth.

If central Florida continues to grow without regional planning, residents can expect more air pollution, a dwindling water supply, more bumper-to-bumper traffic and less access to natural recreation areas, according to a University of Pennsylvania study on the region. Its population is expected to double to 7 million by 2050.

Community leaders for the \$850,000, state-funded project -- "How Shall We Grow?" -- haven't decided how to implement the plan, expected to be ready in May 2007. They could rely on enforced legislation, like Portland, Ore., or voluntary implementation, like Salt Lake City.

"A variety of it could be laws; it could be financial funding," Florida project director Shelley Lauten said. "I bet it will be a combination of everything."

Portland is the nation's only city where an elected regional government uses legislation to enforce a growth plan, officials there said. Other areas of the country might not accept the "Metro" model, but having elected regional officials does provide direct accountability to the public, said Metro President David Bragdon.

Metro champions environmental causes, plans for land use and transportation, and manages garbage disposal and recycling for 1.3 million residents in Portland and three counties and 25 cities surrounding it.

Then there's Envision Utah, a nonprofit organization with no regulatory authority and no financial incentives. The group, which started in 1997, covers an area of 1.7 million residents who comprise 80 percent of the state's population.

Locals weren't comfortable with a regional governing body wielding a lot of control, said Tedd Knowlton, Envision Utah planning director. Still, 60 percent of communities in the area have adopted through code or ordinance at least one strategy supported by the group.

"That's substantial change," he said.

Before Envision Utah, voters vetoed a light rail system in 1992. In a 2000 election, it passed with support from 80 percent of voters, Knowlton said.

Several other regions have replicated Utah's model, including Baltimore; Austin, Texas; and Sacramento, Calif.

Like the other regions, central Florida will have to find a way to balance urban and rural needs. Take three very different counties -- Seminole, Osceola and Orange.

Seminole has 400,000 people, 7,000 acres of natural land and the state's best schools, said its commissioner, Brenda Carey.

"How do we maintain all that?" she said.

In Osceola, officials joke that cows almost outnumber people. Orange County has a bustling downtown, theme parks and a major university.

But they have come to agree that now is the time to start planning.

Said Osceola County Commissioner Ken Shipley: "We need to be asking what have you done for your region, not what have you done for your city, county."

BP Refinery in Texas Called Biggest Polluter

The Associated Press

In the San Francisco Chronicle and Washington Post, Sunday, May 7, 2006

HOUSTON -- The nation's worst polluting plant is the BP PLC oil refinery where 15 workers died in an explosion last year, raising questions about whether the company has been underreporting toxic emissions.

BP's Texas City refinery released three times as much pollution in 2004 as it did in 2003, according to the most recent data from the Environmental Protection Agency.

The increase at BP was so large that it accounted for the bulk of a 15 percent increase in refinery emissions nationwide in 2004, the highest level since 2000.

The company is investigating whether it has been accurately documenting pollution, the Houston Chronicle reported on Sunday. There could be more federal fines levied against the energy giant if mistakes are found.

BP already faces a record \$21.3 million fine from the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration for 300 safety and health violations found at the Texas City refinery after the deadly explosion in March 2005 that also injured 170 workers.

The company reported that it released 10.25 million pounds of pollution in 2004, up from 3.3 million pounds the year before, according to EPA's Toxics Release Inventory, which tracks nearly 650 toxic chemicals released into the air, water and land.

BP cautioned that its latest pollution estimates might not be correct because of a recent change in how the plant calculates emissions.

"These were on-paper calculations -- not based on real measurements through valves or stacks," spokesman Neil Geary told the newspaper.

According to the EPA, the Texas City plant had more than three times the toxic pollutants as the nation's second most-polluted plant, an Exxon Mobil Corp. refinery in Baton Rouge, La.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality said it was too early to speculate about the accuracy of BP's reported figures. A spokesman said the difference might have been in reported emissions, not actual emissions.

But the Environmental Integrity Project, a Washington-D.C. based advocacy group, said the increase shouldn't be dismissed as merely an increase on paper.

"It's real; it just never got reported before," said Eric Shaeffer, a former EPA staffer and the organization's founder. "You can argue that it's not an increase, but the next sentence has to be, 'We've always been bad.'"

Most of the increase in pollution was from formaldehyde and ammonia, which can form smog and soot and irritate the eyes, nose and throat.

BP says that when all pollution is taken into account, emissions from its Texas City plant have dropped 40 percent since 2000.

Before last year's explosion, the refinery processed up to 460,000 barrels of crude oil a day and 3 percent of the nation's gasoline.

BP still faces criticism for management lapses that may have contributed to last year's explosion. The company faces a possible Justice Department investigation and is dealing with victims' lawsuits.

[Commentary in the Madera Tribune, Thursday, May 4, 2006:](#)

More forward thinking needed in government

By Cal Tatum - Tribune Writer / Photographer

The only constant is change, but people are much like cats. We hate change. We also don't like to think about change and how it will affect our lives, or that of our children. But, we must think ahead and prepare for change. Recently I have enjoyed seeing people within our county who are thinking toward the future.

Rayburn Beach, planning director for Madera County, is one such person. His work on the Rio Mesa Area Plan, with his staff, proves a willingness to plan for the future. We can't stop building homes because of our ever-increasing population. To think we can stop, or even slow growth, is unrealistic. What we can do is direct growth in areas that will better serve the residents of Madera County and protect more of our agricultural lands a little longer.

The Rio Mesa plan is one where many residents can live and work in the same community. It has a slightly higher density than some developments, saving more open land for agricultural uses. The plan will create a community that is interconnected and reduces impacts on roads and air because it should cut back on commuting.

Other impacts are being mitigated for, everything from roads to air quality. The county is taking steps to make certain developers will be responsible for the impacts they create, not the county.

I have heard members of the Board of Supervisors discuss construction of courthouses, sheriff's stations, District Attorney's offices. They talk about creating a "campus" for such facilities since they "all serve the same clients," said Supervisor Frank Bigelow.

Great idea! Why spend county money on transportation back and forth?

More forward thinking is what California needs.

One of the largest expenses of building a new school is in the engineering. Each and every school is different from the ground up. Why can't the state work with counties and help direct growth. Set standards by population on when to build a new school. Purchase lands ahead of time. Then standardize school construction. Making each school the same would save a fortune in design and in purchasing materials for construction.

Schools don't have to be different in each community or neighborhood. In fact, we can't afford to do that any longer. Standardizing school construction, planning and directing growth will save California taxpayers millions of dollars and provide a more equal and fair education for students.

[Sacramento Bee, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, May 7, 2006:](#)

The real happy cows

The April 28 front-page photo of a herd of beef cattle under a sycamore tree was pretty, but misleading.

The subject of the article was the methane emissions of 2.5 million dairy cows. How about a photo of dairy cows standing packed together eating methane-rich alfalfa feed?

Range beef cattle eat natural grass and are usually smaller than dairy cows, producing much less methane. Range cattle are essentially a replacement for wild ungulates that would be emitting methane instead of the beef cows.

.Beef cattle raised in California are mostly raised on private land without government support. The dairy industry is subsidized and price-supported by the government. Well-run cattle ranches provide habitat for our wildlife, utilize natural resources and are a buffer to unrestrained development.

Please don't lump the beef cattle ranchers with dairies.

Michael Robie, Sacramento

[Sacramento Bee, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, May 7, 2006:](#)

Feeding flatulence

April 28 was a beautiful spring day. The Bee chose to use valuable space on the front page above the fold for, indeed, a bucolic picture of a meadow, cows, an oak and snow-capped Sierra.

Then The Bee ruined it by captioning "bovine flatulence contributes to ... the worst air pollution in the nation." San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says, "The district is looking at regulating emissions from dairies, possibly through changes in animal feed that produce fewer digestive gases."

Sure, that's easy! What about the damage caused by senior citizens? As one myself, I am often accused of producing more flatulence. Is there some air pollution agency to dictate what I will eat?

What has become of editorial common sense?

Ralph Harder, Jackson

[Letter to USA Today, Sunday, May 7, 2006:](#)

\$3 a gallon sounds like deal to Europeans

I liked the sound of snappy headlines heralding "Pain at the pump." What I didn't like was the tirade of wailing in the dark that followed.

Three dollars a gallon? Yes, please! It's the equivalent of \$6 a U.S. gallon where I live (Germany) and more where I come from (Britain). And it has been not far short of that price for years.

Fuel is a limited resource, and a precious one. And the potential effects of pollution are horrendous.

Join the rest of the world and accept that we all have to economize on fuel. More stories that put your "pain" in perspective might be a good idea. So would a few tips on how to save fuel - and money.

For example: Drive slower. Accelerate gently. Start slowing down earlier. Pump up the tires to their proper pressure. Get unnecessary weight out of the trunk. Carpool. Don't drive when you can walk or ride a bicycle. Don't leave the engine running when you are shopping. Only use the air conditioning if you really need it.

And the most important thing: When you change your car, buy a smaller, more economical one. Then you can drive a bit faster again.

But you know all that, right? And the rest of the world already does these things, so why not Americans?

I can't tell you how bemused we all are when we see you waving your arms in the air over the \$3 gallon. Time to "get real," as you say.

Mark Perucki, Neustadt, Germany