

Officials undecided on dairies

Plan would place two dairies near Allensworth park

By Jed Chernabaeff, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, Sept. 14, 2006

With strong opposition from neighbors and environmental officials, Tulare County's Planning Commission was left deadlocked Wednesday as to whether it should pass a proposal to establish two dairies within miles of an African-American monument.

Instead of approving or denying a proposal that would allow two dairies to house more than 7,000 cows within miles of Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park, the Tulare County Planning Commission voted 3-2 on Wednesday to move the proposal to the Tulare County Board of Supervisors - with no recommendation - at a later date.

Sam Etchegaray of Visalia applied for the special use permit to construct the dairies west of Earlimart.

Under the proposal, the Earlimart Ranch Dairy would house up to 3,500 Holstein milk cows, while the Phillips Ranch Dairy facility would accommodate a maximum of 4,000 Holstein milk cows. Each of the proposed dairy sites contains 160 acres and is located on the east side of Highway 43, south of Avenue 56, approximately 3.5 miles west of Earlimart and north of Allensworth.

The park preserves Allensworth, the only California town to be founded, financed and governed by African Americans.

Before the decision, more than a dozen Tulare County residents opposing the two dairies raised concerns involving health issues, proximity of the dairies, and misrepresentation on the Planning Commission.

Nettie Morrison, chairperson of the Allensworth Community Council, said she and other residents who have health issues fear that the air quality effects from two dairies would affect them even further.

"The air quality in the area is poor already, and people are sick," Morrison said. "I don't think anybody has taken that into consideration."

John Chen of Merced, a volunteer at the state park, said he doesn't oppose the dairy industry, but doesn't think the effects on wildlife - including the blunt nosed lizard, brown boring owl, and the Kangaroo rat - at the park have been taken into consideration.

"We can't even mow our lawns at the park because of the animals," Chen said. "This dairy will have an environmental impact."

Ed Pope of Earlimart said he is concerned about the proximity of the dairies to a park. He added that a decision to approve the dairies by the Tulare County Planning Commission, which doesn't have African-American representation, would put the county in a negative light.

"You people know nothing about our sensibilities and what is going on," Pope said. "If you do this, you will start a national situation [with the African-American community]. You are asking for Tulare County to have a horrible reputation."

The comments appeared to have an effect on the Planning Commission, which agreed that the dairies would be beneficial, but conceded that the proximity next to the park would be a problem.

Planning commissioner Melvin Gong, who motioned to deny the permits, said the park could be a start to a multicultural venue for the county and the region.

"Allensworth has provided a seed, not just for Black people, but for Hispanic people too," Gong said. "Expanding [the park] will go far longer as far as creating tolerance in the county."

Planning commissioner John Elliot said the dairies "encroach" upon the county's cultural well-being. He added that the Planning Commission usually looks at the effects of residential development on farming

"I think this is an issue that we need to look into reverse," Elliot said. "Are we encroaching on the preservation of our cultural heritage?"

Elliot said most dairies usually have negative air quality effects, but admitted that the park should sway the commission's decision.

"We have an opportunity to preserve the park," Elliot said. "If nothing else, that is enough to look elsewhere."

Questions have been raised at previous meetings as to whether the environmental effects on the town and state park were addressed sufficiently.

Caroline Farrell, a staff attorney with the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, said that effects on air quality could mean health issues to residents nearby. She added that there was not an environmental report on the state park.

Annee Ferranti, a staff environmental specialist with the California Department of Fish and Game, said mitigation measures concerning the Allensworth Ecological Preserve have not been addressed. Water from the land may run off into the preserve.

"There is no protection in case of an accidental release," Ferranti said. "If a farmer applies too much water it can go into the preserve."

Beverly Cates, a county planner, said each issue raised in previous meetings and on Wednesday have been addressed in a final environmental impact report and acknowledged that two issues - air quality and uncontrolled discharges - could have significant effects.

Cates said before the proposal would pass, a statement of overriding considerations - a document that acknowledges the effects that says the benefits outweighs burden - would be submitted.

David Albers, who represents Etchegaray, said the commission is not opposed to the dairy and said the conflict lies with the proximity of the state park.

Albers said his client is frustrated because the permit was applied for in 1998, but has been caught in a backlog of cases of a 2000 lawsuit filed by the Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment against the county. The two sides settled in 2001 and agreed to expand countywide environmental impact reports to analyze effects dairies have on air quality and groundwater and to consider air quality mitigation measures throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

"I guess it's better than a denial," Albers said.

Local companies trying to think outside the car

by Rebecca F. Johnson

Tri-Valley Herald, Thurs., Sept. 14, 2006

PLEASANTON — City of Pleasanton employees have an added bonus if they take BART, Altamont Commuter Express, carpool, bike or walk to and from work: A \$2 per day bump in their paycheck.

The city also offers a public transit subsidy, monthly drawings for people who use alternative such modes of transportation and a commuter of the year prize, Economic Development Specialist Lisa Adamos said.

Several large employers in the area, including Oracle and Safeway, also offer incentives to their workers to get out of their cars or share them with others.

But plenty of employees who work in the Tri-Valley area arrive at their jobs solo in their vehicles, which leads to congestion on the interstates, traffic clogging city streets and poor air quality from car emissions.

Tuesday, the Tri-Valley Air Quality Resource Team — which implements programs for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District — held a forum at Shaklee in Pleasanton to provide information to local employers and encourage them to promote and enhance commute programs.

"In the Valley, the pollution is essentially trapped in this area," said Jim Smith, the district's Spare the Air resource team coordinator. "It's critically important for us to be doing work in the Tri-Valley."

Some attendees were representatives of companies that already provide some alternate commute options and were looking to enhance them, but others were aiming to start new programs, said LaShawn Martin, employer services representative for 511 Regional Rideshare Program.

Martin said numerous people who work in the Valley commute from San Joaquin, Solano, San Francisco and Contra Costa counties and could benefit from 511's rideshare program that sets people up into carpools, vanpools or bike buddies.

Being able to find people to fill a carpool or vanpool tends to be the No.1 reason why people don't participate in such programs, Martin said.

People also worry about what happens if they need to get home unexpectedly or stay late at work — which is why 511 offers a guaranteed ride home via taxi or rental car voucher in such situations.

"This really removes the stigma of 'what will happen if my child is sick' or 'what if I have to work overtime,'" Martin said.

For both employees and employers, there are also tax benefits to commute programs, 511 Rideshare Consultant Stuart Anderson said.

Another 511 consultant, Elham Shirazi, touted the importance of having commute programs such as carpooling if a natural disaster should occur and certain routes can't be accessed.

"Think about it," she said. "Every carpool will help. Every vanpool will really help in reducing the number of cars on the road."

Ag Expo entices foreign visitors

Government officials tour Valley agricultural sites, plan to attend Feb. event.

By Dennis Pollock / The Fresno Bee

Wednesday, September 13, 2006

TULARE - You can add a few more names to the list of high-powered foreign visitors coming to next year's World Ag Expo in Tulare, thanks to a visit Tuesday to the event site by agricultural attachés representing more than two dozen countries.

Renata Kunkera, economic counselor with the embassy of the Republic of Croatia, announced during a luncheon on International Agri-Center grounds that the secretary of agriculture for that country will head a delegation that will visit in February.

When it comes to cattle, Croatia is dwarfed by Tulare County's nearly 800,000 cows, Kunkera conceded.

The entire country of Croatia has about 400,000 cattle, Kunkera said, adding that Croatians already are doing business with one central San Joaquin Valley company.

World Wide Sires in Visalia has provided what Kunkera characterized as "one very happy bull."

Kunkera visited Tulare as part of a tour staged by the Foreign Agricultural Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Most of those on the tour are foreign agricultural attaches stationed at embassies in Washington, D.C.

The weeklong swing through California included Tuesday visits to a Kern County site where biological controls are used to fight an insect pest that carries a deadly disease into vineyards, a stop at the Heritage Center at the International Agri-Center, a tour of Altra Biofuels in Goshen and a visit to a citrus grove in Exeter. Today, the group will visit the Harris Ranch feedlot in Coalinga.

The Heritage Center luncheon was sponsored by the San Joaquin Valley International Trade Association. Candy Hansen, director of the Center for International Trade Development in Fresno, said the tour is an important showcase for the expo and California agriculture in general.

"It is a big deal," she said, referring to the size of the group - some 40 people - and the diversity in countries represented. Alphabetically, they range from Australia to Switzerland

Export seminars put on by the Fresno center are an important part of the expo, which has a distinct international flavor. Last year, it drew more than 1,000 foreign visitors from 66 countries.

Among them was Jean-Marc Trarieux, first secretary for agriculture and fisheries with the European Union, Delegation of the European Commission, who attended last year's expo. Trarieux urged his colleagues to follow suit during the Tulare visit.

Lyle J. Sebranek, deputy administrator of foreign agricultural affairs with the USDA, said the attaché tour is held annually in different states.

"It's intended to foster cooperation and understanding," he said. "The attachés represent their countries' interest, but it's important to see agriculture firsthand and see what it involves. That can help on issues such as food safety and quarantines."

Many of the attachés have been assigned in the United States only a few years.

A notable exception is Victoriano Leviste, dean of the foreign agricultural attachés in the embassy of the Philippines. He has been stationed in the United States for 23 years.

"These tours are good, because it helps us understand American agriculture better, and we can compare our problems and see what we share," he said. "It helps to learn about the production, and especially the technology that is used."

Lina Ochieng, agricultural and commercial attaché with the embassy of the Republic of Kenya, said she was especially interested in the use of wasps to control the spread of the glassy-winged sharpshooter and a demonstration given in Kern County.

"Most of our pest-control advice comes from the European Union," she said.

Clare Thorp, first secretary of agriculture with the embassy of Ireland, said her country has been nicknamed the Celtic Tiger because of its economic recovery. She said it is now poised to seek research help from the United States and more investment in U.S. food companies.

During a visit to Altra Biofuels in Goshen, Baoqing Zhao talked of Chinese interest in ethanol technology.

"We import lots of gas, and we have already introduced the technology," said Zhao, first secretary with the economic and commercial affairs office of the embassy of the People's Republic of China. "We're interested for two reasons - to reduce air pollution and to help our farmers, who can sell their corn and get cash."

Lee to host HIV-AIDS, air-quality meetings

from Staff Reports

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Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Oakland, will hold two town hall meetings Saturday — one on HIV/AIDS and another on West Oakland's abysmal air quality.

Lee and a panel of community leaders will host "Getting Real: a Forum about HIV/AIDS" from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday in the Merritt College Gymnasium, 12500 Campus Drive, Oakland, to raise awareness about the disease's impact upon the African-American community and to foster community involvement in stopping its spread.

Then she'll hold a town hall meeting from 1 to 3 p.m. in the West Oakland Branch Library, 1801 Adeline St., Oakland, with representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project, the Port of Oakland and the U.S. Postal Service.

West Oakland has some of the nation's highest asthma rates due in large part to diesel fumes from ships and trucks moving cargo in and out of the Port of Oakland. Residents are invited to come to the meeting for information on efforts to improve local air quality and environmental health and to learn how to help protect their families' health.

Asthma attacks spike when school begins

By Erin Kelly, Gannett News Service

USA Today, Tuesday, September 12, 2006

For millions of children with asthma, the start of the school year can bring a rise in severe attacks and trips to the emergency room.

More than six times as many asthmatic children of elementary school age are admitted to the hospital in early fall compared with the hot, smoggy days of summer, according to studies by scientists in the USA and Canada.

"Researchers speculate that it has to do with kids getting together in small indoor spaces again and passing around viruses," says Norman Edelman of the American Lung Association. "Getting a respiratory virus such as the flu or a cold can trigger an asthma attack."

Indoor air pollution as diverse as mold growing on ceiling tiles and fur shedding off the class hamster also can cause attacks. Even the fumes from strong cleansers used by janitors can pose a threat.

"Then there's the problem of the diesel-powered school bus sitting out front with its motor running," Edelman says.

Making matters worse, many parents send children back to school without giving teachers and school officials the information and medication they need to help prevent a potentially deadly attack.

According to a lung association poll, 73% of parents of children with asthma report they are concerned about how their child's asthma will affect participation in school, yet fewer than half talk to the teacher about their child's asthma (48%) or make sure medicine is available at school (42%).

The lung association recommends that parents sit down with their child's doctor and write up an asthma action plan that informs school staff about symptoms, daily medications and limits on

physical activity. "We don't want children to end up having a crisis at school, especially when it can be prevented," Edelman says.

Amalie Helms of Flint, Mich., has been in touch with the preschool teacher and the school nurse who will help care for her 4-year-old twin boys. Connor and Phelan have severe asthma.

"I let their classroom teacher know that one of the things that can bring on asthmatic attacks for my guys are perfumes and hair sprays," says Helms, 35, a single mother. "They can literally be allergic to their teachers."

Patricia Sardinha of Juno Beach, Fla., says her 9-year-old daughter Emily's attacks have been triggered by the stress of returning to school or taking a big test. Early on she enlists the school nurse's help.

"I bring the nurse flowers at the beginning of the school year and line up all my daughter's prescription medications on her desk, and we have a meeting," Sardinha says. "She knows what to do if Emily has trouble."

But Helms believes some parents are reluctant to talk about their child's condition because children who have asthma often are stigmatized as weaklings who can't play sports or run around at recess. "When kids see TV shows like *Jimmy Neutron*, they see the asthmatic friend portrayed as a fat, nerdy kid with an inhaler. Teachers and coaches need to understand that if asthma is controlled, these kids can do anything."

Philanthropy Google's Way: Not the Usual

By Katie Hafner

N.Y. Times, Thursday, September 14, 2006

SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 13 - The ambitious founders of Google, the popular search engine company, have set up a philanthropy, giving it seed money of about \$1 billion and a mandate to tackle poverty, disease and global warming.

But unlike most charities, this one will be for-profit, allowing it to fund start-up companies, form partnerships with venture capitalists and even lobby Congress. It will also pay taxes.

One of its maiden projects reflects the philanthropy's nontraditional approach. According to people briefed on the program, the organization, called Google.org, plans to develop an ultra-fuel-efficient plug-in hybrid car engine that runs on ethanol, electricity and gasoline.

The philanthropy is consulting with hybrid-engine scientists and automakers, and has arranged for the purchase of a small fleet of cars with plans to convert the engines so that their gas mileage exceeds 100 miles per gallon. The goal of the project is to reduce dependence on oil while alleviating the effects of global warming.

Google.org is drawing skeptics for both its structure and its ambitions. It is a slingshot compared with the artillery of charities established by older captains of industry. Its financing pales next to the tens of billions that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will have at its disposal, especially with the coming infusion of some \$3 billion a year from Warren E. Buffett, the founder of Berkshire Hathaway.

But Google's philanthropic work is coming early in the company's lifetime. Microsoft was 25 years old before Bill Gates set up his foundation, which is a tax-exempt organization and separate from Microsoft.

By choosing for-profit status, Google will have to pay taxes if company shares are sold at a profit - or if corporate earnings are used - to finance Google.org. Any resulting venture that shows a

profit will also have to pay taxes. Shareholders may not like the fact that the Google.org tax forms will not be made public, but kept private as part of the tax filings of the parent, Google Inc.

Google's founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, believe for-profit status will greatly increase their philanthropy's range and flexibility. It could, for example, form a company to sell the converted cars, finance that company in partnership with venture capitalists, and even hire a lobbyist to pressure Congress to pass legislation granting a tax credit to consumers who buy the cars.

The executive director whom Mr. Page and Mr. Brin have hired, Dr. Larry Brilliant, is every bit as iconoclastic as Google's philanthropic arm. Dr. Brilliant, a 61-year-old physician and public health expert, has studied under a Hindu guru in a monastery at the foothills of the Himalayas and worked as a Silicon Valley entrepreneur.

In one project, which Dr. Brilliant brought with him to the job, Google.org will try to develop a system to detect disease outbreaks early.

Dr. Brilliant likens the traditional structure of corporate foundations to a musician confined to playing only the high register on a piano. "Google.org can play on the entire keyboard," Dr. Brilliant said in an interview. "It can start companies, build industries, pay consultants, lobby, give money to individuals and make a profit."

While declining to comment on the car project specifically, Dr. Brilliant said he would hope to see such ventures make a profit. "But if they didn't, we wouldn't care," he said. "We're not doing it for the profit. And if we didn't get our capital back, so what? The emphasis is on social returns, not economic returns."

Development of ultra-high-mileage cars is under way at a number of companies, from Toyota to tiny start-ups. Making an engine that uses E85 - a mixture of 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline - is not difficult, but the lack of availability of the fuel presents a challenge, said Brett Smith, a senior industry analyst at the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Another barrier, Mr. Smith said, lies in the batteries for so-called plug-in hybrids, which require more powerful batteries that charge more quickly than the current generation of hybrid batteries.

There are skeptics, too, among tax lawyers and other pragmatists familiar with the world of philanthropy. They wonder whether Google's directors might be tempted to take back some of the largess in an economic downturn.

"The money is at the beck and call of the board of directors and shareholders," said Marcus S. Owens, a tax lawyer in Washington who spent a decade as director of the exempt organizations division of the Internal Revenue Service. "It's possible the shareholders of Google might someday object, especially if we go into an economic depression and that money is needed to shore up the company."

And there is the question of how many of the planet's problems can truly be addressed by a single corporate entity.

But even while expressing reservations about Google's approach, Mr. Owens said that the structure of Google.org "eliminates all the constraints that might otherwise apply."

The only conventional part of Google.org is the Google Foundation, a nonprofit with an endowment of \$90 million that is constrained in how it spends by the 501(c)(3) section of the Internal Revenue Service code.

Google's big philanthropic experiment lies in the part of Google.org where the bulk of the funding now resides. This part of Google.org will be fully taxable, with the ability to invest in a full spectrum of programs and companies.

All of Google.org's spending, Dr. Brilliant said, will be in keeping with its mission, and there is to be no "blowback." That is, should Google.org make a profit with one of its ventures, those funds will not go to the search engine business, but will stay within Google.org.

Google had existed for only six years, when, in advance of the company's initial public offering in August 2004, Mr. Page and Mr. Brin told potential investors that they planned to set aside 1 percent of the company's stock and an equal percentage of profits for philanthropy. By the end of 2004, Google.org was formed.

The company has said it plans to spend the money over the next 20 years, and the Google board recently approved a more rapid disbursement rate, \$175 million over the next two years. "Poor people can't wait," Dr. Brilliant said. "Dying people can't wait for some 20-year plan. It's not what we're doing here."

Ventures that grow out of Google.org could be seen to have a competitive edge because they do not need to show a financial profit. But financial returns from a project like the high-mileage car are not necessarily the aim.

"I think how you count profit is the issue here," said Peter Hero, president of the Community Foundation of Silicon Valley, a charitable foundation with about \$1 billion in assets. "Google.org is measuring return on cleaner air and quality of life. Their bottom line isn't just financial. It's environmental and social."

Once Google.org was formed, the company spent months searching for an executive director. There was no lack of interest in the job.

"Literally thousands of people worldwide got in touch with us," said Sheryl Sandberg, the Google vice president who led the search. "We'd get someone who was an amazing technology entrepreneur but who didn't know anything about the developing world."

Then along came Dr. Brilliant, an affable man generous with bearhugs and self-deprecating humor whose unlikely résumé looks like a composite career summary of multiple high achievers. After receiving his medical degree, Dr. Brilliant studied for two years with Neem Karoli Baba, a famous Hindu guru.

As Dr. Brilliant tells the story, in 1973, shortly before the guru's death, he told Dr. Brilliant to "take off the ashram whites" and use his skills as a physician to help eradicate smallpox, which was devastating India at the time.

Dr. Brilliant joined a team of United Nations workers who painstakingly worked their way through India inoculating people against the disease. In 1980, the World Health Organization declared that smallpox had been eradicated.

In 1978, Dr. Brilliant started the Seva Foundation, which focuses on preventing and curing blindness throughout Asia and Latin America. In 1985, Dr. Brilliant was a co-founder of the Well, a seminal online community. Throughout the 1990's and early 2000's, he ran several high-tech companies in Silicon Valley.

Dr. Brilliant first heard about Google.org in early 2005 while lying in bed in India, sick with dysentery. He had gone there to work with the polio eradication program of the United Nations and, while recovering, he saw news of Google.org in a local newspaper.

He sent an inquiry to the only e-mail address he could find: info@google.com. He got no response.

This year, Dr. Brilliant was awarded the TED Prize, an award given at the annual Technology, Entertainment and Design conference, a gathering of leaders from the technology and entertainment industries. The prize awards three recipients \$100,000, and a “wish” for how to change world.

Dr. Brilliant’s wish was for the creation of an “early detection, rapid response” system for disease outbreaks. The idea would be an open-source, nongovernmental, public access network for detecting, reporting and responding to pandemics.

Some Google insiders heard about the award and invited Dr. Brilliant to give a talk at the company. Mr. Page and Eric E. Schmidt, Google’s chief executive, were in the audience as Dr. Brilliant described the polio eradication efforts of the United Nations. They agreed they had found their director and began to recruit him.

At first, Dr. Brilliant said, he was thrilled. But then he turned skeptical, largely because of the for-profit structure of the organization.

“I got weak knees,” he said. “It was weird. It was precedent setting.” After several lengthy conversations with executives at Google, Dr. Brilliant changed his mind. Six months into the job, he has traveled to India to visit eye clinics and polio vaccination projects with Mr. Page, and to China to discuss clean energy alternatives. Next week, he leaves for Africa to visit Google grant recipients in Ghana.

Dr. Brilliant said he had no desire to “reinvent the wheel” by working on projects others are already involved in. And although Google is a high-tech company, that does not mean that Google.org will be throwing around high-tech solutions.

“Why would we put Wi-Fi in a place where what they need is food and clean water?” he said.