

High costs force small dairies out of business

By Reed Fujii, Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Monday, Sept. 24, 2007

A new federal analysis shows basic economics - the simple balance of profit and loss - are driving small dairies out of business in California and the rest of the nation, leaving fewer, but increasingly larger, dairies.

And while environmentalists decry the impact of farms whose herds number in the thousands, ironically it is the large-scale operations that can best bear the costs of more-stringent air and water pollution restrictions now being imposed.

One Lodi dairy farmer, Hank Van Exel, increased his operation by buying out another farmer a few years ago and now oversees the handling of 1,600 cows, even if that's not his first choice.

"I'd love to have just my very best cows, and have 400 cows and make a nice living; that would be a wonderful thing," he said.

But the increasing price of fixed expenses - such as \$200,000 feed trucks, \$100,000 tractors and million-dollar milking parlors - can best be supported by larger and larger operations.

"What you can do to maximize your efficiencies over those fixed costs (is) basically ... getting more cows into a facility," Van Exel said.

That's what the U.S. Economic Research Service, a Department of Agriculture agency, found.

"Large dairy farms have substantial cost advantages over smaller farms, derived from the ability to take advantage of economies of scale," it reported. On average, farms with 1,000 or more cows realize a cost savings of 15 percent compared with dairies with 500 to 999 cows. "Other evidence suggests that costs may continue to decline as herds increase to and above 3,000 head."

So Van Exel is justified at feeling his dairy is a "tweener," even though it's nearly twice the California average of roughly 900 cows.

Nationally, there has been a nearly 90 percent decline in the number of dairies over 36 years.

"Between 1970 and 2006, the number of farms with dairy cows fell steadily and sharply, from 648,000 operations in 1970 to 75,000 in 2006," the study found. Also, "the average herd size rose from just 19 cows per farm in 1970 to 120 cows in 2006."

California, where dairies run larger than national averages, still lost many farms, going from 4,473 dairy operations in 1970 to 1,974 last year, according to state figures.

But 2006 was unusually hard on the state's industry, due to a cow-killing July heat wave, record low milk prices, rising production costs and increasing regulatory burdens, said Michael Marsh, chief executive of Western United Dairymen.

"We lost about 10 percent of the state's dairies over the past 12 to 18 months due to a combination of those factors," he said. "We may dip below 1,800 (dairy) farms in California in the next several weeks."

In San Joaquin County, milk production is the No. 1 farm product, valued at \$261 million last year.

While milk prices have rebounded this year, many farmers are still trying to make up for the losses they experienced in 2006, Marsh said.

"The dairies in California are family operations. They are passed from generation to generation," he said. "There may be families that make a different decision and the next generation may be the last."

It is harder for smaller dairy operators to make up their losses, said Ann Silva, owner of Bacchetti & Silva, a Tracy dairy.

"The big thing is when you lose money, everybody loses money, but where you're making money, you don't have the numbers to recoup your losses ... you need to have tremendous milk flow to recoup your losses."

"Actually, I should be bigger than I am right now," said Silva, who's currently milking 775 cows three times a day. Her dairy has been at that size for many years and probably won't change.

"Fifteen, 16 years ago we were a large California dairy," she said. Currently, it's a mid-sized operation and "quickly we'll become a small California dairy."

"We'll ride it out for another couple of years, and then we're probably going to sell the cows."

Not all small dairies are unprofitable, however.

Marsh said good management practices can produce profits at smaller operations, many which can be found in California.

Others may pursue niche markets, where they can earn a premium for their products, said Jean Halloran, director of food policy initiatives at Consumers Union in New York.

"The fastest growing segment of milk is organic milk. Those guys are making money," she said. "They are doing better than the people doing conventional production."

With many consumers increasingly concerned about food-safety issues, and adverse to modern technologies that critics charge compromise quality, many are willing to spend more money on organically produced milk and butter.

"The attraction of organic to the public is such that a lot of the conventional processors, or the daily companies, are trying to make their milk more like organic, particularly like banning the use of bovine growth hormone," Halloran said.

Still, she conceded that larger farms do have cost advantages.

"It almost looks like the bottom's falling out for the middle tier," Halloran said. "Either you're going to little small, organic production or you're going to bigger, industrial-type of milk production."

At least one area dairy owner, however, said small might still be beautiful.

Walt Kessler, who cares for about 230 milking cows (with younger animals about 450 in all) in Galt, said sharp increases in the cost of feed, due mainly to demand for corn to produce ethanol, and potential labor shortages due to tightening immigration restrictions, might hit hardest at large dairies.

Even though he might have a larger dairy if it weren't for urban encroachment, Kessler said the federal analysis is history.

"What you're reading is not happening now and next year," he said. "You've got to look ahead now."

Farmers with smaller dairies, able to produce enough feed on their own land and relying only on themselves and their families for labor, could beat out large operators who have to rely on outside feed suppliers and hired hands.

"The dynamic was changed now that the inputs are up," Kessler said.

Week in Review

Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Sept. 23, 2007

If you missed your *Californian* this past week, you missed a lot of news. Here's a summary of the breaking news, noteworthy events and relevant trends -- along with the occasional oddity -- from the last six days.

For updates on these or other stories, visit bakersfield.com.

Origins of valley pollution questioned

What: Wildfire smoke that drifted through Bakersfield and other parts of the San Joaquin Valley in the past few months has raised new questions about how much of the valley's air pollution comes from other areas of the state.

Until now, air regulators believed neighboring regions contributed little, if any, to the valley's filthy air. But satellite images of recent wildfires show smoke coming from areas north and south of the valley.

What's next: The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will study whether smog-forming pollutants from factories and vehicles also drift into the valley from other regions.

Athletic complex withdrawn

Report requirement leads man to drop plans for sports fields

By Jenny Shearer, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Sept. 22, 2007

It's game over for a proposed sports complex south of Taft Highway off Enos Lane, near the Buena Vista Aquatic Recreation Area.

Developer Dale Scales decided against pursuing the Western Meadows Sports Complex because the Kern County Planning Department asked that he do [air and water quality studies](#) and an environmental impact report. He notified the Planning Department about his decision in a Sept. 10 letter.

Scales, 72, said Friday that he doesn't want to wait five years to see his idea become a reality. He was hopeful county staff would welcome his project, particularly after the parking snafu that happened Sept. 8 during opening day at the Kern County Soccer Park on Alfred Harrell Highway. Crowds and confusion about parking led to citations being issued at the northeast Bakersfield facility.

Other projects near Scales' proposed complex, including the new racetrack, did not have to provide an environmental impact report for approval. The racetrack was approved on a mitigated negative declaration. Scales questioned why his idea could require the lengthy document.

But Ted James, the county's planning director, said specific issues for each project site are examined. Those issues determine what type of environmental documents are required. Scales' land is in the middle of areas that are sensitive for endangered species, James said.

Anyone interested in using the land for a sports complex would have to submit an application to the county Planning Department. James encouraged parties to talk to wildlife agencies, the county's parks and recreation department and nearby neighbors.

Scales thought Western Meadows would complement the soccer park. He submitted his plans for the complex to the county in late July.

Plans for the 288-acre site included 28 athletic fields and five baseball/softball diamonds. The facility would have featured 23 acres of practice fields, a 200-space RV park, and football and baseball stadium. The project would have been built in phases and included a roping arena, homes on 1- to 2 1/2-acre parcels and some commercial elements.

Scales may make some parcels on his land available to a group called Vision in Sports to use for athletic purposes.

"If they would like to pursue it, that's fine. But I'm not going to because I don't need that headache," Scales said.

Tony Fox, who owns Soccer Warehouse Plus and is part of Vision in Sports, said he knows he can "get the people to put it together, if he's willing to give us the land."

Congestion costly for local drivers

Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Sept. 23, 2007

A Texas A&M University study of national traffic congestion in 2005 contains some specific information about Bakersfield.

And it's not good.

From 1995 to 2005 the metropolitan area's dysfunctional road system gobbled up more and more of Bakersfield drivers' time and money and congested our roads for longer periods of time.

The cost of congestion to you in lost time and higher costs:

1982: \$19 a year

1995: \$95 a year

2005: \$259 a year

Congestion cost Bakersfield \$66 million in excess expense and lost productivity in 2005.

The number of hours you spend in delayed traffic each year:

1982: 2 hours

1995: 7 hours

2005: 14 hours

Drivers lost a total of 3.5 million hours to traffic delays in 2005.

Number of hours of congested traffic per day:

1982: 2.2 hours a day

1995: 2.9 hours a day

2005: 4.2 hours a day.

The length of time Bakersfield drivers suffer through "rush hour" conditions has nearly doubled.

Excess fuel burned in traffic by one driver:

1982: one gallon a year

1995: four gallons a year

2005: eight gallons a year

Bakersfield drivers wasted a total of 2.1 million gallons of fuel in traffic in 2005.

Percent of travel done on congested roads:

1982: 4 percent

1995: 12 percent

2005: 27 percent

You now drive more than one mile in congested traffic for every four miles you drive in Bakersfield.

Population in metropolitan Bakersfield:

1982: 230,000

1995: 360,000

2005: 470,000

The number of people in Bakersfield has increased by 30 percent in the past 10 years.

State-SoCal officials agree on reducing nitrogen oxide pollution

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Saturday, September 22, 2007

LOS ANGELES-State and regional officials announced Friday an agreement to reduce air pollution from trucks, trains, construction equipment and ports.

The state Air Resources Board and the South Coast Air Quality Management District agreed to reduce levels of nitrogen oxides by 76 tons a day, according to a statement from the two agencies.

Nitrogen oxides are blamed for contributing to particulate pollution.

The agencies said the reduction will be achieved by "stringent mandatory regulations as well as incentive programs." These will involve heavy-duty truck fleets, locomotives, construction and other off-road equipment, and commercial charbroilers and wood-burning.

The cuts will help the area meet a federal 2015 deadline to clean air in the AQMD region, which covers major portions of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties, and all of Orange County.

The area has an overall target of reducing emissions from 1,000 tons a day currently to 454 tons a day in 2014. The cuts will come from a mixture of incentive programs and new rules.

"This agreement signals the dawn of a new day in cooperation between state and local air quality agencies," Mary Nichols, chair of the Air Resources Board, said in the statement.

Southern California has some of the country's worst particulate air pollution. The pollution is made up of microscopic particles that can enter the body and cause respiratory diseases and other problems.

As LA schools are built near freeways, experts issue warnings

The Associated Press

In the L.A. Times, Fresno Bee, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Monday, September 24, 2007

LOS ANGELES-Health experts are warning that school campuses being built near freeways could put students at risk of asthma and other problems caused by road pollutants.

Five school buildings are under construction within 500 feet of freeways in different parts of the city, with two more campuses near highways in the planning stages, the Los Angeles Times reported Monday.

The schools being built were approved after planners incorporated air filtration systems to strip out road toxins in order to obey a 2003 state law that otherwise bans school construction near freeways.

But some health experts said filters can not remove ultra-fine particles, which studies have linked to asthma and bronchitis.

"Ultra-fine particle numbers are highest on and around freeways and in experimental studies appear to have much higher levels of the damaging chemicals that are found to have health effects," said Andre Nel, nanomedicine chief at University of California, Los Angeles' medical school.

Last year, more than 60,000 Los Angeles Unified students attended 70 schools situated within 500 feet of a freeway, records showed.

The district stopped building schools near freeways about two decades ago, but resumed doing so when choosing sites for new campuses being built as part of an ongoing \$20-billion school construction and modernization program.

Seven new schools within 500 feet of a freeway have since opened, district records showed.

Officials did not address ultra-fine particles in their analysis of pollution levels near those campuses, and were not required to do so by the state regulations.

But Angelo Bellomo, the district's environmental health and safety chief, said recent scientific reports on the particles' dangers prompted him to start including them in analyses of sites near freeways.

His office recently began requiring a buffer between schools and freeways of at least 200 feet, which one study showed was the range in which ultra-fine particles are most prevalent, he said.

Bellomo said his office recommended that the two schools under consideration include air filtration systems and that they limit outdoor activity when air quality is bad, in addition to not building within 200 feet of the road.

But even with those measures, he said, students and school employees would still be exposed to higher than usual levels of contaminants.

L.A. Unified continues to build near roads that spew pollution despite a state law and evidence of health hazards.

By Evelyn Larrubia, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Monday, Sept. 24, 2007

Despite a state law that seeks to prevent schools from being built near freeways and mounting evidence that road pollutants harm children's lungs, the Los Angeles Unified School District is in the process of adding seven new schools to the more than 70 already located close to highways.

Last year, more than 60,000 L.A. Unified students attended school within 500 feet of a freeway, records show.

A 2003 state law prohibits school districts from building campuses within 500 feet of a freeway, unless the district can mitigate the pollution or determines that space limitations are so severe that there are no other options. In Los Angeles, officials say their choices have become more and more limited.

As the district undertakes a \$20-billion school construction and modernization program, officials have considered a number of sites close to freeways. The district is now building five schools on lots that are within 500 feet of them.

In the coming months, the Board of Education will decide whether to begin construction of two more: Central Region Middle School No. 9 at Euclid Avenue and 7th Street, near Interstate 10, and Central Region High School No. 15, at 2100 Marengo Street, adjacent to the 10 near the interchange with the 5 Freeway. Those campuses are in addition to the nine L.A. Unified charter and regular district schools that have opened near freeways since 1997.

As the construction program continues, the Board of Education could be facing more such decisions.

School board President Monica Garcia, in whose district both pending schools are located, said through a spokesman that she was concerned about children's health, but that she would support the new campuses if the district was able to mitigate the dangers.

Carlos Estrada owns a small market and restaurant across from Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center, where the district wants to build a high school. It could be a lucrative deal for Estrada, but he's not interested.

Estrada, who grew up in that East Los Angeles-area neighborhood, has nothing against new schools but said he has a big problem with the district building one on this particular site, roughly 90 feet from the 10 Freeway.

"I don't want to be one of those people who went ahead and sold the property because they want the money. My wife and I don't need the money," Estrada said. "I personally don't want a school that's going to harm the health of the children."

Scientists from both UCLA and USC have been studying the health effects of freeway contaminants in recent years and have found that they are significant. A report released in

February said that children who live near freeways are more likely to suffer from decreased lung function than those who do not live near them.

One of the main culprits, researchers say, seems to be ultra-fine particles, noxious specks that are so light and tiny that they're hard to capture or filter.

"Ultra-fine particle numbers are highest on and around freeways and in experimental studies appear to have much higher levels of the damaging chemicals that are found to have health effects," said Andre Nel, chief of nanomedicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and co-director of the Southern California Particle Center.

A study by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment found increased asthma and bronchitis among San Francisco Bay Area children who attended schools near major thoroughfares.

The problem is not limited to Los Angeles. According to the South Coast Air Quality Management District, 2.3% of California public schools -- about 170 -- are located within 500 feet of high-traffic roads, those that carry more than 50,000 vehicles per day.

The vast majority of the L.A. Unified schools situated within 500 feet of a freeway were constructed before 1977. In some cases, the freeways were built after the schools.

In the two decades that followed, the district built 24 schools, but did not build that close to freeways again until it embarked on its current bond-funded construction program.

Of the schools opened near freeways in the last 10 years, the first was the Watts Learning Center, a high-performing charter. That school opened on the site of a former church near the 110 and is one of five charters built within 500 feet of a freeway in the last decade.

During that time, the district itself has opened four schools that close: Hesby Oaks in Encino; Olympic Primary Center in downtown Los Angeles; West Adams Preparatory High School, just west of downtown; and the Bellevue Primary Center in Silver Lake.

"I think local schools are really, really important, and I believe in public schools," said Marsha Rose, 50, a state vocational rehabilitation counselor who lives near Hesby, a K-8 school. "But I think it's so important for them to have activities that are active and healthy, and I think it's really hard when they build it that close to the freeway."

Hesby was an older school that for several decades was used as administrative offices. In need of classrooms, the district decided to remodel and reopen it as a school. The interchange of the 101 and 405 freeways looms behind the play yard.

At a 2004 public meeting, Rose told district officials that she was worried about the health effects of freeway pollutants on children who would attend the school.

"They said they could override [the law] if there was a need for schools," said Rose, who does not have children. "But I think for the health of all of our children, if you have information, you need to deal with it."

A 2004 district assessment of the Hesby site predicted that at least one contaminant would be present at three times the limit and recommended upgrading the heating and ventilation systems to filter out pollutants. The district made the upgrade.

The assessment did not discuss ultra-fine particles, which cannot be filtered. But state law does not limit the presence of those particles. Nor does it explicitly require that districts address them in health evaluations, officials said.

In addition to the new schools already opened, the district is building five within 500 feet of freeways, campuses that were approved by the board between 2001 and 2006:

* Central Los Angeles High School No. 1 in Hollywood, adjacent to the 101 at the former site of the Metromedia Fox Studio.

* Central Los Angeles High School No. 9, replacing an old high school turned district headquarters at 450 N. Grand Ave. in downtown, off the 101.

* Vista Hermosa, formerly known as Belmont High School, in downtown, off the 110.

* East Valley Area New High School No. 1A and Valley Region Middle School No. 3, on Arleta Avenue, bordering the 170, in Sun Valley.

The district was not required to analyze the effects of air pollution from nearby freeways until the 2003 law took effect. For each of the schools under construction, the district concluded that air filtering would eliminate enough of the toxins to make the school safe for children.

That's partly because, as in the Hesby analysis, the district did not address the ultra-fine particles that researchers believe cause the most harm.

Angelo Bellomo, head of the district's Office of Environmental Health and Safety, which conducts the health studies, said recent scientific reports have prompted him to reassess how his office evaluates sites near freeways. Now, he said, all of the analyses discuss ultra-fine particles.

Because of this, he said, he recently instituted a buffer of at least 200 feet between schools and freeways. He arrived at that figure because a study showed that ultra-fine particles are most prevalent within the first 200 feet from a major roadway.

Bellomo's office's analyses of the two pending schools near freeways indicated that they both suffered from significant pollution and recommended three steps to mitigate damaging effects: air filtering, reduced outdoor activity when air quality is particularly bad and a 200-foot buffer from the freeway.

He concedes that even with those measures, children and school employees still would be exposed to more contaminants than they would otherwise.

He said that if the school board wants to build on the edge of a freeway anyway, it will have to find that the benefits outweigh the health risks.

"It would be very difficult to justify such a finding," Bellomo said. "We are trying to do a better job dissuading the real estate agents from even looking at properties that are close."

Jim Gauderman, the lead researcher on a series of USC studies that found increased asthma and decreased lung function in children who lived near freeways, said science has yet to pinpoint how close to a freeway is too close. But he found significant detrimental effects on children who lived up to 500 meters away -- slightly more than 1,600 feet.

He said air filters are no panacea. "They're not going to work on ultra-fine particles, and they're not going to work on gases," he said. "They're only going to work when the kid is inside. The minute the kid steps out or starts playing P.E. and breathing heavy, they're not going to be useful.

"It just makes sense that if you're going to have children spending a lot of time in a location and you know that location is polluted -- and I don't care if it's air, water or whatever -- that you would try to avoid that situation at any cost. Those kids are going to be there at four, five, seven years. That's a lot of time when you accumulate it."

The district has not addressed whether to protect the children and staff at the dozens of existing schools that are close to freeways. The schools are clustered in East Los Angeles and the northeast San Fernando Valley, areas with more than their share of both freeways and poverty.

Bellomo said his office is considering what to do about existing schools. The best solution, he said, is stricter regulation of freeway contaminants because it would protect not only the students but also the thousands of residents along those traffic corridors.

When Amalia Campos enrolled 5-year-old Claris Perez at West Vernon Elementary in South Los Angeles this summer, a form asked whether her daughter had any chronic health problems. "Asthma," she wrote.

Campos didn't know about the effects of freeway pollution. No one at the year-round school, which borders the 110 Freeway, told her about the studies, she said. But then, neither did the doctors who diagnosed and have treated Claris' asthma since she was 2. "They should let parents know about the risk," said Campos.

Claudia Garcia was standing outside the campus recently, waiting to pick up several children whom she cares for after school.

She had heard about the studies regarding the health effects of road toxins.

"The truth is, I wouldn't want my daughter going here because of that. I'd like to find her a better school," she said, looking down at Clara Hernandez, 3. "Maybe I'll move."

Companies seek ways to curb gas emissions

Cap-and-trade program seen as least expensive and most efficient

By Julia Scott, Staff Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, Sept. 24, 2007

California's power utilities, oil companies and natural gas refineries may be looking at the year 2012 with some trepidation. That's when the California Global Solutions Act ushers into effect new carbon dioxide emissions reductions to 1990 levels by 2020.

But one sector of the economy - the "clean tech" industry, largely based in Silicon Valley - will reap the windfall of a new investment climate that has already spawned dozens of renewable energy, biofuel and transportation technology companies who will rise to meet increased demand as the price of traditional energy goes up.

Instead of spelling the end for the traditional energy sector, experts say there's a way that everyone can win - if the state adopts an aggressive "cap-and-trade" program that allows California's biggest polluters to choose how they want to meet mandated greenhouse gas reduction requirements.

The eventual result will be more investment in solar, wind and other clean tech industries, which utilities like PG&E are already conscripting to provide an ever-greater proportion of the energy customers consume.

Earlier this summer, a group of scientists, investment experts and environmental legislators released a report to the California Air Resources Board recommending a cap-and-trade program as one of the least expensive and most efficient incentive-based approaches to reducing CO2 and other greenhouse gas emissions. They laid out a plan to be adopted for implementation in 2012.

The principles of cap-and-trade are fairly simple. After the Air Resources Board establishes how much CO2 companies are emitting, it will impose a CO2 "cap" that shrinks every year and monitor facilities to ensure they are complying. Facilities will receive allowances in the form of pollution credits determined by the cap level. The allowances are less than the amount of pollution permitted by the cap. As a result, a company must make up the difference by reducing its CO2 load - for instance, by closing a dirty, coal-fueled power plant.

If a company has met its emissions reduction goals for the year, it can sell, or "trade" the remaining allowances to another company that's having more trouble making changes. Since the allowances are sold at a high market rate, and since there are fewer of them on the market every year, industries have a major incentive to cut back on their emissions. Overall, the level of CO2 in the atmosphere drops every year - regardless of who is buying or selling the allowances.

"This would stop businesses from fighting with the government and instead compete with each other to make money off their ability to reduce emissions," said Winston Hickox, chair of the advisory committee that wrote the report on cap-and-trade. A former secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency, Hickox believes the regulation-only approach the U.S. government implemented in the 1970s with the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts doesn't work as

well today, now that corporations are wealthy enough to sue states over regulations they don't like.

Instead, he believes it's better to allow companies to compete amongst themselves for allowances while they reduce emissions across the board.

Using a market-based approach to regulating pollution has provoked criticism over the years because it is perceived as giving corporations a license to pollute.

That argument has no merit, Hickox contends.

"In no way do I think that cap-and-trade programs do anything except put pressure on industries. If companies have an enormous amount of money in coal plants, they are going to have to play themselves out, while no new plants can be built."

The Natural Resources Defense Council offered a cautious endorsement to the advisory report. One concern was the fact that it allows companies who have trouble reducing their emissions to buy carbon offsets instead.

In cases like that, there must be a system in place to ensure that any offsets a company buys, such as planting a grove of trees elsewhere in California, are real and verifiable, said Ralph Cavanaugh, an energy expert with the NRDC.

"We want to be very careful that offsets do not become a huge loophole that swallows the program," he said.

Carbon dioxide accounts for 85 percent of California's overall greenhouse gas emissions, according to the report. Electricity accounts for approximately 24 percent of those emissions, while transportation accounts for 40 percent.

Those sectors are now the focus of dozens of companies that have sprung up across Silicon Valley and the rest of the Bay Area, companies that will soon be tasked with finding the best non-carbon-based alternatives to generate energy on a market scale.

"There's an awful lot of venture capital being directed in Silicon Valley's direction, from battery storage to plug-in hybrid-car technologies, to new building materials," said Margaret Bruce, co-founder of

Sustainable Silicon Valley.

Billions of dollars, in fact. According to Clean Edge Inc., a local energy research firm, venture capital investments in clean tech startups now stand at \$2.4 billion, up 262 percent from 2000. The clean tech industry itself is projected to be worth \$92 billion by 2013.

Products in development now range from Watt Stopper, a Santa Clara company that produces energy-saving devices like lighting dimmers and occupancy sensors, to Philips Lumileds of San Jose, which produces a new kind of light technology that's brighter and longer-lasting than compact fluorescents.

PG&E spokesman Keely Wachs said the Northern California utility is in talks with several solar and solarthermal Silicon Valley-based companies to buy a portion of their energy for customers. PG&E already buys a significant portion of its electricity from Bay Area and California companies specializing in wind, geothermal, hydropower and biomass-based energy generators. By 2010, these renewable energies will account for 20 percent of PG&E's portfolio, according to Wachs.

"We have a huge responsibility as a company to addressing the climate change challenge," he said, adding that paying for renewables doesn't always come cheap.

"The reason we've been able to make all these investments is because our customers want to, and our customers are willing to pay for it. They are paying, per kilowatt hour, more than a customer anywhere else in the country," said Wachs.

Energy and gas prices will likely continue to rise in the coming years as California-based companies struggle to meet carbon caps and face other market challenges, according to Bruce of Sustainable Silicon Valley. If they do, that could spell more good news for the "clean tech" sector.

"Prices for some things will go up," said Bruce. "To the extent that prices motivate changes in behavior, it will be easier for innovative technologies to enter the market."

Schwarzenegger tells UN of California climate efforts

By CHARLES J. HANLEY | AP Special Correspondent

In the Bakersfield Californian and Sacramento Bee, Monday, Sept. 24 2007

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told an unprecedented summit on climate change Monday that "the time for doubt has passed" and a breakthrough is needed in global talks to sharply reduce emissions of global-warming gases.

"The U.N. climate process is the appropriate forum for negotiating global action," Ban told assembled presidents and premiers, an apparent caution against what some see as a U.S. effort to open a separate negotiating track.

The U.N. chief also addressed a chief U.S. objection to negotiated limits on greenhouse-gas emissions, that it will be too damaging to the American economy.

"Inaction now will prove the costliest action of all in the long term," Ban said.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, another speaker opening the summit, told the international delegates U.S. states are taking action.

While the Bush administration has resisted emissions caps, California's Republican governor and Democrat-led Legislature have approved a law requiring the state's industries to reduce greenhouse gases by an estimated 25 percent by 2020. Other U.S. states, in various ways, are moving to follow California's lead.

"California is moving the United States beyond debate and doubt to action," Schwarzenegger said. "What we are doing is changing the dynamic."

The one-day meeting, with more than 80 national leaders among some 150 participants, also was scheduled to hear from Al Gore and international figures including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and France's President Nicolas Sarkozy.

U.N. chief Ban organized the summit to build political momentum toward launching negotiations later this year for deep cutbacks in emissions of carbon dioxide and other manmade gases blamed for global warming.

President Bush, who has long opposed such negotiated limits on "greenhouse gases," wasn't participating in the day's meetings but was to attend a small dinner Monday evening, a gathering of key players hosted by Ban.

Rather than accept treaty obligations, Bush has urged industry to cut emissions voluntarily, and emphasizes research on clean-energy technology as one answer. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, leading the U.S. delegation, was to address a technology session at Monday's conference.

On Thursday and Friday, Bush will host his own two-day climate meeting, limited to 16 "major emitter" countries. It's the first in a series of U.S.-sponsored climate gatherings.

Many environmentalists fear the separate U.S. "track," which will involve China and India, may undercut the global U.N. negotiating process. But some hope it eventually helps draw those two big developing nations and others into a new, U.N.-negotiated emissions regime.

This first-ever U.N. climate summit looked ahead to December's annual climate treaty conference in Bali, Indonesia, when the Europeans, Japanese and others hope to initiate talks for an emissions-reduction agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol in 2012.

The 1997 Kyoto pact, which the U.S. rejects, requires 36 industrial nations to reduce heat-trapping gases emitted by power plants and other industrial, agricultural and transportation sources by an average 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2012.

Advocates say a breakthrough is needed at Bali - almost certainly requiring a change in the U.S. position - to ensure an uninterrupted transition from Kyoto to a new, deeper-cutting regime.

To try to spur global negotiations, the European Union has committed to reduce emissions by at least an additional 20 percent by 2020.

Bush has objected that Kyoto-style mandates would damage the U.S. economy, and says they should have been imposed on fast-growing poorer countries, such as China and India, as well as on developed nations.

The U.N. summit follows a series of reports by a U.N. scientific network that warned of temperatures rising by several degrees Fahrenheit by 2100 and of a drastically changed planet from rising seas, drought and other factors, unless nations rein in greenhouse gases.

The U.N.-sponsored scientists reported global average temperatures over the past 100 years rose 1.3 degrees, and the planet's sea levels rose 6.6 inches, as oceans expanded from warmth and from the runoff of melting land ice.

Just last week, U.S. scientists reported that warmer temperatures this summer had shrunk the Arctic Ocean's ice cap to a record-low size.

Bush Steps Out Front on Climate Issue

But No Policy Shift Is Planned as Nations Begin Debate on Post-Kyoto Accord

By Steven Mufson and Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post Staff Writers

Washington Post, Sunday, September 23, 2007

Amid a mounting sense of urgency about the need for action to slow climate change, President Bush this week will be playing what is, for him, an unusually prominent role in high-level diplomatic meetings on how to confront global warming.

What he will not do, officials said, is chart any shift in policies that have put him at odds with much of the world on the issue.

Tomorrow, at a private dinner on climate change hosted by U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Bush will join about two dozen other heads of state, several from countries most vulnerable to higher temperatures and rising seas. On Thursday, he will address a White House-hosted climate change conference that will include senior officials from rapidly developing nations such as China, India and Brazil, which have been reluctant to divert economic resources to curb their rising greenhouse gas emissions.

Top Bush administration officials said the president is not planning to alter his opposition to mandatory limits on greenhouse gases or to stray from his emphasis on promoting new technologies, especially for nuclear power and for the storage of carbon dioxide produced by coal plants.

James L. Connaughton, head of the president's Council on Environmental Quality, said Bush's goals are to come up with standard "harmonized" tools for measuring carbon dioxide emissions; review current climate policies around the world; kick off talks about ways to cut greenhouse gases in specific sectors of the economy; and aim for a "solid handoff to the next president, regardless of party." Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson Jr. is expected to propose lower tariffs and export credits for clean energy technology.

That could disappoint many of the diplomats, activists, experts and business executives converging on New York and Washington this week with higher hopes.

"It's a great initiative that [Bush] has taken," said Lars G. Josefsson, chief executive of the European utility Vattenfall AB and an adviser to German Chancellor Angela Merkel. "But of course with that initiative, he also takes on a responsibility, which means he has to deliver."

The sense of urgency comes not only from new evidence of climate change but also because the pioneering Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. Although the United States never ratified the protocol, and developing countries have no obligations under it, the accord has served in Europe as the basis for a far-reaching cap-and-trade system for limiting emissions. (Such systems allow companies to buy and sell the right to emit global warming gases.)

United Nations Foundation President Timothy E. Wirth, who, as President Bill Clinton's undersecretary of state for global affairs, helped broker the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, said the political atmosphere is more conducive to forging a global warming pact now than it was a decade ago. "The environment is one of much greater knowledge, a much greater sense of urgency and a rapidly changing politics," Wirth said.

But he faulted the Bush administration for promoting dialogue without pressing for concrete commitments. "When you don't want to do anything, talk process. Nowhere in this process is this administration talking about a concrete commitment," he said. "Is this administration going to be the one to break the logjam? I haven't seen any evidence of that."

Bush's meetings are not the only ones planned this week. More than 80 heads of state will discuss climate issues at the United Nations tomorrow, and Indonesia will lead talks among countries that hope to be compensated for limiting deforestation, which contributes to global warming. Nongovernmental groups, such as the Clinton Global Initiative, are also holding events.

All these meetings are precursors to a two-week session in December in Bali under the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 15-year-old agreement that governs global-warming negotiations.

Secretary General Ban, who has made climate change a top priority, is seeking to build enough political momentum to ensure that the Bali meeting provides the "road map" to replace the Kyoto Protocol. Robert C. Orr, the U.N. point man on climate issues, said: "We want to elevate the climate change debate to the political level. Talking to heads of state, you find they are more flexible and more focused on the big picture than their negotiators."

To put the next agreement in place, the world's nations must complete a pact in late 2009, most officials think.

One European official, who asked not to be identified for fear of jeopardizing the talks, said he fears that the Bush administration's aims for next week amount to "a necessary but not sufficient agenda" for negotiators preparing for Bali.

"If it looks like this is setting a ceiling for Bali, rather than a floor, then the Europeans will have difficulty with this," the official said. "It's not yet clear how this will turn out."

Businesses are also looking for definite measures. "These meetings are all vital steppingstones to achieving an agreement for the post-2012 period," said Andrei Marcu, chief executive of the International Emissions Trading Association, a nonprofit group. He said businesses are seeking "clarity" and "predictability."

Some hopes that Bush might be softening his position stem from speculation that he might support bipartisan congressional moves to draw up a mandatory program for capping greenhouse gases in the United States. Several proposals have been made in the Senate, and key committees in both chambers are drafting bills.

Rep. Rick Boucher (D-Va.), head of the House subcommittee on energy and [air quality](#) and one of the lead lawmakers on cap-and-trade legislation, said he met with Connaughton, head of Bush's environmental council, and White House economic adviser Al Hubbard and came away believing that White House support for some sort of cap-and-trade bill is possible. "There haven't been any stoplights yet," he said.

But Connaughton indicated that the administration still has objections to cap-and-trade proposals.

He said the administration thinks cap-and-trade bills would treat consumers unfairly and drive investment out of the country. The White House will oppose anything that would "make Granny pay 20 percent more for electricity" if that money were to "go to pay for more efficiency in China," Connaughton said, questioning whether "a woman on fixed income in Ohio should pay for carbon dioxide reductions in the oil sector."

Connaughton said the administration prefers measures that would limit emissions or promote technologies in specific sectors of the economy, such as raising fuel economy and appliance efficiency standards.

Environmental groups said the Bush proposals for raising fuel economy standards would not be enough. Environmental Defense said last week that even the relatively stringent Senate proposal for fuel economy, combined with the House's requirements for renewable-fuels use and conservation incentives, would hold carbon dioxide emissions only to 104 percent of 2005 levels in 2030 and 111 percent in 2040.

By contrast, a German environment ministry spokesman said in an e-mail last week, Germany holds that developed countries need to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 30 percent below 1990 levels by 2020 and by 60 to 80 percent below by 2050.

Some experts said that if the administration is not willing to make commitments, it could undercut its mission of drawing developing nations into climate regulation.

"The view of the Chinese government is that the developed countries, which are responsible for the bulk of the CO₂ in the atmosphere, should take the lead," said Erica S. Downs, an expert on China and energy at the Brookings Institution. "While many in the U.S. like to argue that China should take the initiative because it is on the verge of surpassing the U.S. as the largest CO₂ emitter, the Chinese like to focus on the fact that their per-capita CO₂ emissions are only a fraction of those of the U.S. and that China's CO₂ emissions in recent decades are only a small fraction of the world total."

China, eager to burnish its image ahead of the Beijing Olympics and in the wake of product-safety issues, may highlight its energy conservation measures and an initiative to include environmental issues as one measure of the performance of provincial officials. But such steps are relatively modest.

"If the U.S. manages actually to pass some legislation that includes mandatory emissions reductions, the Chinese would probably find their way to making some legal commitment," said Eileen Claussen, president of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, who recently visited Chinese officials. "Absent that, I don't see China doing that."

[N.Y. Times commentary, Sat., Sept. 22, 2007:](#)

This Climate Is Surely Full of Hot Air

By JOE NOCERA

Sometimes the only thing to do is just state the obvious. So here goes: The climate change petition that was promoted last week as a boon for investors and for the environment has almost no chance of ever being adopted. Wait - did I say almost? I take it back. It has no chance. Zero. Zilch. None.

The petition, on the off-chance you missed it, was drawn up by Environmental Defense, the big advocacy group, and Ceres, which describes itself as "a leading coalition of investors, environmental groups and other public interest organizations working with companies to address sustainability challenges." It asks the Securities and Exchange Commission to force companies to begin disclosing their "climate change risk" in their financial documents.

The petition was given to the media in plenty of time for reporters to write what we in the business like to call "curtain raisers," in advance of a big news conference that was held on Tuesday. Let it never be said that environmentalists don't know how to generate good publicity.

Of course, Attorney General Andrew M. Cuomo of New York is no slouch in that department either. A few days earlier, Mr. Cuomo sent subpoenas - that's right: subpoenas! - to five companies who have the temerity to want to build coal-fired electric generating plants. He, too, claimed to be concerned with climate change risk.

"The increase in CO2 emissions from the operation of these units, in combination with Peabody Energy's other coal-fired plants, will subject Peabody Energy to increased financial, regulatory and litigation risks," he wrote in the letter to Peabody Energy, the nation's largest coal company. He added, "We are concerned that Peabody Energy has failed to disclose material information about the increased climate risks Peabody Energy's business faces."

In other words, Mr. Cuomo was going a good deal further than Ceres. He was claiming that under current S.E.C. rules, companies already had a duty to disclose "climate change risk" - at least as those risks are defined by the New York attorney general's office.

(Never mind that none of the companies in Mr. Cuomo's sights are based in New York. As his predecessor, Eliot Spitzer, proved, when you're the attorney general of New York State you can pretty much investigate anything you want, anywhere in the United States, so long as you can make it appear to be somehow related to investor protection.)

"If you take Exxon Mobil," said Mindy S. Lubber, the head of Ceres, "they provide almost no analysis and disclosure of climate change as a business risk. I would argue that climate change is a huge threat to the company's business." She added, "The role of the S.E.C. really is about making sure companies really do know the risks and disclose them so that investors can make smart decisions."

I realize that many of you have just put down your morning coffee in order to nod your head in approval. But I would ask you, please, hold the applause. Putting aside the fact that both the Ceres petition and the Cuomo subpoenas are feats primarily of environmental grandstanding, the real problem is that these measures, appealing though they may seem at first glance, are misleading and disingenuous. To put it more bluntly, they are an attempt to use regulation and litigation to force companies to toe the environmentalist party line on global warming, and to change corporate business models in ways that are more pleasing to the environmental community. It's environmental tyranny disguised as public policy.

By now, of course, there is no longer an argument over whether global warming is real; even Exxon Mobil is on board. (Question for William Safire: why did the phrase "global warming" morph into "climate change?" Just wondering.) The question of what this ultimately means, however, isn't remotely settled. Andrew Logan, who directs the energy and finance programs at Ceres, said that climate change is an issue that will ultimately put the big oil companies "out of business." He added, "We are heading towards catastrophe."

But Gregg Easterbrook at the Brookings Institution, author of "The Progress Paradox," who has written lucidly over the years about environmental issues, said that it was far from certain that global warming would require radical changes, by either individuals or corporations. "Global warming is fundamentally an air pollution problem," he said, "and in the past, air pollution problems have turned out to be far cheaper to fix and much more quickly corrected than anyone thought at first."

Indeed, Vic Svec, a spokesman for Peabody Energy, pointed out that previous furors over the pollution caused by coal-fired plants - particulate matter and sulfur dioxide - have largely been solved. Mr. Easterbrook told me that he suspected that the same would be true of carbon emissions. "Someone will invent the gizmo" that solves the problem, he said.

Whether you agree with that assessment or not, it is a legitimate point of view - and corporations have every right to hold that view, and act on it in making investments for the future. History, after all, is full of instances where the sky was supposed to be falling - and then didn't after someone "invented the gizmo" that took care of it (Y2K, anyone?). Yet underpinning the efforts by Mr. Cuomo and Ceres is the belief that such a view is not, in fact, a legitimate basis upon which to base corporate strategy - and that companies need to be forced back into line.

Let's look at Mr. Cuomo's effort first, since it is the more egregious of the two. When I spoke to Eric O. Corngold, Mr. Cuomo's executive deputy attorney general for economic justice, he took umbrage at my suggestion that his office was trying to get companies to toe some party line. "Climate change is perhaps the central issue energy companies are going to face," he said - stating as fact something that many energy executives might well disagree with. He added, "We just want to make sure that what companies are telling investors is fair, complete and not misleading."

So how is the attorney general conducting his investigation into corporations hoping to build coal-fired power plants? By asking for internal documents and e-mail messages that might show - let's cross our fingers! - that executives fear bigger risks in building new coal-fired plants than they have acknowledged publicly. In other words, he wants to do to Peabody Energy what Mr. Spitzer did to Henry Blodget and Merrill Lynch.

And why is he doing this? For the same purpose that Mr. Spitzer used the Blodget e-mail: to force an industry to change its behavior. See, once he has the messages in hand, he can brandish them before the court of public opinion to "prove" that Peabody Energy is hiding the truth about the risks inherent in building coal fired plants. Of course, at least part of the risk facing Peabody Energy is the risk of being sued by environmentalists - who will use Mr. Cuomo's "evidence" to do just that. It's lovely the way this works, isn't it? You investigate them for not disclosing risk, even as you're creating the risk through your investigation.

When you think about it, Mr. Cuomo could do this to any company over any business decision he happened to disagree with. For instance, he could subpoena General Electric to investigate whether the company's upbeat rhetoric surrounding Ecomagination, the company's new environmental thrust, reflects its internal view. I can guarantee that he would find plenty of embarrassing "evidence" showing top-ranking officials disagreeing vehemently with the chief executive, Jeffrey Immelt, who essentially shoved Ecomagination down their throats. But Mr. Cuomo would never conduct such an investigation. By his lights, Ecomagination is to be encouraged, not stopped.

What's more, when I went to Peabody Energy's annual report, I saw a section that talked about climate change risks in the same fashion as it talked about the other risks the S.E.C. mandates in financial disclosure documents. John Hill, an analyst who follows the company for Citigroup, said, "I can tell you for a fact that the whole subject of global warming and climate change is extensively disclosed by Peabody."

To her credit, Ms. Lubber at Ceres was at least honest enough to admit that her goal is not just to get companies to disclose more information but to change their behavior. "What gets measured gets managed," she said. She and Mr. Logan believe that if companies were forced to lay out for investors how global warming could affect their businesses, it might then cause them to want to make their business models more environmentally friendly. "When they look more broadly at the risks," Mr. Logan said, "they'll start making different investment decisions."

But, as Mr. Easterbrook asks, if the S.E.C. ever decided to act on the Ceres petition, "What do you actually disclose? What do you warn your shareholders about?" The law says that companies have to disclose anything that could have a "material adverse effect" on the business. There is simply no way of knowing right now whether global warming will have any effect at all on companies, much less a material adverse one. Looking out into the future to assess climate change risk is really little more than an exercise in public relations. Last time I looked, BP was one oil company that was big on disclosing climate change risk - when it wasn't busy cleaning up after itself in Alaska.

When I put that question to Ms. Lubber and Mr. Logan, one of their responses was that companies needed to disclose regulatory risk - the fact that Congress is in the process of teeing up bills that will tax carbon emissions, for instance. But even that risk is impossible to gauge: there is no consensus on what bill will emerge, or when, or how much it will cost. "The unstated presumption is that punitive, onerous legislation is coming your way that will cost you a lot of money," Mr. Easterbrook said.

In the end, both the Ceres and Cuomo efforts are little more than sideshows - but telling ones nonetheless. They presume that all right-thinking people should believe what they believe about global warming - and that therefore public policy can be built around those presumptions. They assume that the big, bad corporations must be brought to heel even as the rest of us continue to buy our S.U.V.'s and sixth iPod.

They completely ignore the obvious fact that our energy needs continue to rise - and that the threat that's actually imminent is that we won't have enough conventional power plants to keep the country's lights on. As they are using weapons - S.E.C. proposals; Martin Act investigation - that really have nothing to do with global warming.

If you want to attack global warming, then for goodness sake, attack global warming. But trying to force change through the bogus mechanism of "investor disclosure?" It would be funny if it weren't so sad.

[Modesto Bee commentary, Monday, Sept. 24, 2007:](#)

Cardoza leads the way to improved ag funding

By WILLIAM LYONS JR.

For years, many have called upon California agriculture to have a clear and unified voice so that we can advance our common goals. Unfortunately, the diversity of California agriculture -- usually among our greatest assets -- has made it challenging to get everyone on the same page.

This year, we have found a common voice, thanks to the leadership of Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced. As a result of Cardoza's skillful maneuvering, California agriculture is a big winner in the 2007 Farm Bill adopted by the House of Representatives.

Despite being the No. 1 farm state in the nation, California has not received its fair share of funding under previous farm bills. In 2002, California ranked sixth among states getting government payments and 12th among states receiving conservation funding -- despite the fact that California has more environmental regulations to comply with than any other state.

The specialty crop industry was consistently denied federal farm benefits until Congress implemented a Specialty Crop Block Grant Program under an emergency appropriation and then refined again under the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act in 2002. These acts helped to fund the successful "California Grown" marketing program that was developed during my tenure as Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. The funds also provided support for pest and disease prevention, child nutrition and agricultural education programs, as well as helped to establish the Western Institute for Food Safety and Security located at University of California at Davis and the California Institute for Specialty Crops at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

Unfortunately, after the 2002 appropriation, these funds all but dried up.

Immediately upon being elected to Congress, Cardoza saw the 2007 Farm Bill as an unprecedented opportunity to link support of our nation's specialty crop industry with our nation's healthy eating goals to combat obesity and diet-related illnesses. He began laying the groundwork, starting by encouraging California agriculture to speak with one voice, then encouraging California's specialty crop industry to join with specialty crop industries in other states.

Cardoza then introduced a marker bill, "The Eat Healthy America Act," gaining the support of 120 other members of Congress by packaging support for specialty crops, conservation and nutrition and a new vision for the Farm Bill.

After months of skilled negotiations -- whether through his role as a House Agriculture subcommittee chairman, member of the powerful Rules Committee or adviser to his California colleague, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi -- Cardoza was able to secure major changes in the farm bill. This will provide tremendous benefits to California agriculture, if the bill is enacted.

For the first time since the Congress started adopting farm bills in the 1930s, California is a major player.

The bill adopted by the House includes historic increases for specialty crops -- more than \$1.6 billion over five years. These funds will go to support programs addressing research, marketing and trade promotion, food safety and pest and disease prevention and detection. These funds will also increase the amount of healthy fruits, vegetables and nuts in school lunches and snacks. Our specialty crop industry will be more competitive and better-equipped to compete in the global market.

The House bill also provides for a \$2 billion increase to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to help farmers address environmental issues. Most important to the San Joaquin Valley is a set-aside of \$150 million for an air quality program to help farmers meet state and federal regulations.

This bill gives California agriculture the support it deserves.

Now it's time for the Senate to act. California agriculture needs to step up once again to make sure that the gains made in the House bill stick.

Lyons is the former secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. He farms in Stanislaus and Merced counties.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, Sept. 24, 2007:](#)

Better urban planning needed to cut emissions

Think globally. Act locally.

In this case, it's advice for state and local planners. While California received appropriate huzzahs in 2006 for Assembly Bill 32, the legislation that requires a 25% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, an additional avenue is available to combat global warming.

Our communities need to be planned so that residents don't have to rely as heavily on automobiles in going about their daily lives.

The Urban Land Institute recently issued findings from a review of research on the relationship between development, travel and the carbon dioxide emitted by motor vehicles.

The institute said the United States can't rely only on vehicle technology and cleaner fuels to deal with climate change that is heating the planet. Instead, across government, the policies and outlay of transportation dollars should encourage compact development as a way to reduce miles driven.

The report's lead author, Reid Ewing, a professor at the University of Maryland, wrote, "The research shows that one of the best ways to reduce vehicle travel is to build places where people can accomplish more with less driving."

Emissions from cars, trucks and other transportation sources generate 41% of California's greenhouse gases. They are constantly growing as population grows.

Fresno and other cities have taken some steps to shift planning in a better direction. For instance, Peter Calthorpe, an eminent national expert in such matters, has been recruited to lead the work on the Southeast Growth Area Specific Plan. But the inertia of sprawl is powerful, and stronger efforts are needed to stop it.

Sen. Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, did his part with legislation to provide incentives for regional land-use decisions that cut vehicle miles traveled, and thus emissions. He's leading the state in the right direction, if only other lawmakers would join him.

If they do, California can have smarter growth and less sprawl -- and a policy mix that links transportation and planning policies with the state's environmental goals.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, Sept. 24, 2007:](#)

Madera County project will have bad impacts

Madera County Supervisor Frank Bigelow, representing the area for the planned Gateway Village at Avenue 12 and Highway 41, said "I think it's really a good outcome," after the Madera County supervisors gave an OK to the project.

The Bee's editorial Sept. 14 states very clearly why the decision is troublesome and why Supervisor Bigelow is not looking ahead.

The project will add 21,000 residents just north of Fresno's border when traffic already is a real problem. Consider that it takes more than a five-minute wait just to make a right turn from the avenues onto Highway 41 at peak traffic in the morning.

Air quality can only get worse with the huge increase in traffic. Groundwater levels are dropping, causing great uncertainty, and area residents already must go much deeper when replacing wells. Future water supplies cannot be guaranteed as the situation now stands. Gateway Village will negatively affect the quality of life for all the area.

Many counties recognize the problems of uncontrolled growth, and are farsighted enough to forego a present increase in tax revenues in place of massive expenditures that will be needed later to address serious problems. Only the developers will come out ahead.

Betty Sempadian, Madera

[Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Sept. 23, 2007:](#)

Are we ignorant about trees?

Recently *The Californian* asked locals to report on where the best parking spaces were due mainly to shade created by trees. I thank you for the laugh I enjoyed on the subject. Over the years I have noticed the increased mutilation of trees throughout the city, and it enrages me to hear anyone wonder at how their tree could die after an ill-advised "trimming." I understand that some species of trees benefit after a good pruning like other plants, but not every tree needs to be cut down to look like a palm tree.

It is possible to let trees grow and thrive without disrupting daily life. San Luis Obispo is one city where trees flourish and seem to only be trimmed when a mettlesome branch grows directly into a building. San Luis Obispo is already at a cool low 80 degrees this time of year, but under the shade of a thriving tree (or, good gracious, trees!) the temperature drops a good five to ten degrees.

In the fertile San Joaquin Valley, it should be child's play to replicate the metropolitan forest of San Luis Obispo, but, alas, we are still too ignorant or, I pray not, negligent, of the growing cycles of these natural air conditioners. It should be the intention of the city officials to create a canopy over, at least, the metropolitan area of Bakersfield as a cost-effective way to beautify the city through both [air quality](#) and appearance.

Katie Beglin, Bakersfield