

What Will 50,000 MORE Dairy Cows in Fresno County Mean for Our Families?

By dairyair

At FresnoFamous.com, Jan. 4, 2007

Fresno Healthy Dairy
Community Meeting
Wednesday, January 17, 7:00 p.m.
CSUF Craig School of Business,
Alice Peters Auditorium
5245 North Backer Avenue
(Woodrow Ave. between Shaw Ave. and Barstow Ave.)

What happened in Allensworth? Will our County Supervisors take a stronger stand against massive, new commercial dairies coming to Fresno County? Will we be able to have a longer, more honest conversation about the real costs to Fresno County folks? Fresno County does not have an ordinance regulating dairies on the books - they are allowed to come in "by right..."

And what does this do to our health? The way our community smells? Air pollution has given Fresno County some of the highest child asthma rates in America. Now, air pollution from new mega-dairies threatens efforts to improve air quality in Fresno.

Commercial dairies are one of the largest sources of air pollution and smog in Fresno County, responsible for numerous airborne pollutants including particulate matter, ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, methane, and ground level ozone pollution.

Tulare County, which now has more cows than people, recently found that 30% of their PUBLIC WATER systems and 40% of their private wells do not meet the legal levels for nitrates. Come learn more from a panel of Fresno leaders about the ways new commercial dairies could limit air pollution and ground water contamination to protect the health of our communities.

The Fresno Healthy Dairy Campaign is a group of Fresno County parents, doctors, caregivers, clergy, and educators committed to protecting our public health. For more information, please contact Susan at 559-265-2308.

Spare the Air program gets \$7.5M

Critics say prior days were ineffectual in lowering pollution

By Kiley Russell, MEDIANEWS STAFF

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2007

Even though a Bay Area program offering free transit during smoggy days may be an inefficient way to reduce pollution, regional transportation managers voted Wednesday to keep it alive.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission voted unanimously to spend \$7.5 million on the Spare the Air program. Last year the commission spent \$13.2 million to offer six days of free transit during the region's most polluted commute days.

The decision to continue the free-ride days on 26 of the region's transit systems was contingent on an evaluation of last year's program, which was presented to commissioners this week.

The analysis shows a nearly \$411,000-per-ton cost to reduce vehicle emissions, which led one staff member to describe the program's cost effectiveness as "fairly low."

Even with fewer commuters in their cars, the Bay Area avoided exceeding the national eight-hour ozone standard on just two of the six free transit days. However, the report said the "air quality conditions could have been much worse without" the Spare the Air program.

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Also, the campaign "successfully achieved its main goals of raising public awareness about the link between travel choice and air quality and encouraging the public to drive less and take transit more," the report said.

Not all Spare the Air days led to free transit, however, and transit ridership increased only marginally during those three weekdays.

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Sue Lempert, who represents the cities of San Mateo County on the commission, expressed concerns about the cost of the program last year.

She said this summer is predicted to be unusually hot, which will lead to high levels of pollution. She suggested the commission modify the program to encourage "future transit use" by offering three free rides for every six days paid, for example.

Commissioners also expressed interest in finding corporate sponsorships for the program to help reduce its ultimate cost.

Program managers will work this year with BART and ferry operators to improve customer satisfaction during the days.

Last year, BART was inundated with unruly groups of youths who annoyed regular customers.

and the ferries, which saw a more than 300 percent increase in ridership, were overcrowded and delayed.

The commission will work out the details of this year's Spare the Air program over the next few months.

Devil's in details of governor's budget

Schwarzenegger unveils \$143 billion plan for coming fiscal year

By Steve Geissinger, Media News

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2007

SACRAMENTO — After touting popular aspects of his budget, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed a spending plan Wednesday that Bay Area Democrats and advocacy groups said revealed the "devil in the details" for everyone from college students to the poor.

The Republican governor defended his \$143.4 billion, 2007-08 spending plan for the fiscal year beginning July 1 as "providing crucial services" while reducing "our net operating deficit to zero."

Fiscally conservative GOP lawmakers disputed the deficit assertion as inaccurate.

One of the most controversial fiscal impacts in Schwarzenegger's budget was tuition fee hikes for college students — 7 percent at the University of California and 10 percent in the California State University system. Community college fees would remain the same.

Shattering the standout bipartisanship Schwarzenegger forecast this year, Senate leader Don Perata, D-Oakland, and Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, vowed to battle — among other things — tuition fee hikes and social service program cuts.

"It makes no sense to build more prisons while taking away breakfast for poor kids and support for the mentally ill," Perata said.

Activists in the Democratic party's Bay Area stronghold also promised to fight the tuition fee hikes, along with a \$324 million cut and suspending a \$140 million inflation adjustment for CalWorks, the state's welfare-to-work program, which pays for child care and other services.

Other controversial moves include:

- deferring \$1.1 billion in gas tax monies from transportation for other uses
- repealing the \$165 million teacher tax credit
- shifting at least \$33 million in juvenile offender costs to cash-strapped counties
- ending state funding of \$55 million for the program for homeless adults with serious mental illnesses
- deferring \$80 million in work on the state's deteriorating and, in places, ramshackle parks
- slashing \$25 million on a one-time basis from funds for the drug-offender diversion program, voter-approved Proposition 36.

Schwarzenegger, in the wake of previous announcements, had won bipartisan praise for his plans to reform California's health care system, reduce greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicle fuels and borrow to build new classrooms, prisons and two dams.

The governor also plans to overhaul the San Francisco Bay Delta to make it into a better water supply and safer from flooding, while providing more than \$100 million to finish expansion and refurbishing of death row at San Quentin prison.

But the controversial aspects of the governor's budget, scattered with little details through the massive spending plan, altered the mood in Sacramento on Wednesday.

Sen. Ellen Corbett, D-San Leandro, was among lawmakers who said she would battle one of the high-profile issues — the university tuition hikes.

"Times are tough for students, especially in the Bay Area where living costs are high," said the former assemblywoman. "I don't want to balance the budget on the backs of our students. I am opposed to that and will fight the increases."

"Indeed, the devil was in the details" following Schwarzenegger's glowing budget previews and Tuesday's state of the state address, Corbett and others said.

Outside the Capitol auditorium where the governor unveiled his budget, a small group of Bay Area protesters held signs and chanted: "Don't target our children," referring to the CalWorks cuts.

Melissa Johnson of the Berkeley-based LIFETIME (Low-Income Families' Empowerment Through Education), said that "taking away cash aid from California's poor children is cruel and unnecessary.

"Struggling families need help with education and training, child care, and supportive services — not punishment," Johnson said.

Sen. Elaine Alquist, D-San Jose, said she will work to reverse the cuts in CalWorks, which administration officials said are tied to changes in federal rules.

"Poor families spend this money immediately on basic needs such as rent and their food," Alquist said. "I fear the governor's proposals to cut grants would result in more children sent to foster care, just when we're making progress with that overburdened system."

Melissa Michelson, a political science professor at California State University, East Bay, said the "governor's proposed changes to the CalWorks budget are in stark contrast to his rhetoric about centrism at the inauguration.

"These are right-of-center proposals that are already proving divisive — particularly the plan to eliminate the July COLA (cost of living adjustment)," she said.

The cut of \$25 million to the state's \$145 million voter-approved Proposition 36 program, aimed at providing treatment instead of jail time for drug offenders, won't be cost effective, advocates said.

"By cutting funding," said Margaret Dooley of the Drug Policy Alliance, "the governor is gutting one of the best (and most cost-saving) public health programs ever to come out in California."

In an obscure twist in the budget, state departments are to make a combined \$100 million reduction in expenses. There are no public guidelines as to where to make the cuts.

"The (governor's) Department of Finance will work with agency secretaries and other cabinet members to achieve additional general fund savings," according to a summary of the budget.

There was still a glimmer of hope for bipartisan work.

"It's a classic mixed bag of good and bad. And that's a fine place to start," said Assemblywoman Patty Berg, a Eureka Democrat whose district stretches into the northern Bay Area. "But bottom line, ... we will not balance this budget on the backs of seniors or California's most vulnerable citizens."

Arnold sparks revolutionary energy plan

By Ian Hoffman and Janis Mara

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, Jan. 10

In the state's biggest, immediate step toward cutting global warming pollution, Gov. Schwarzenegger on Tuesday began shifting California's 26 million cars and trucks off petroleum-based fuels and toward alternatives that emit less greenhouse gas.

The governor said his new, greenhouse-gas standard for transportation fuels — the world's first — "leads us away from fossil fuel" and would help "in moving the entire country beyond debate, denial and inaction" on global warming.

"Our cars have been running on dirty fuel for too long. We have been dependent on foreign oil for too long, so I ask you to free us from dirty oil and from OPEC," Schwarzenegger said in his state of the state address, referring to the oil cartel.

State air-pollution regulators expect to work out the details over the next 18 months. But the policy would limit the amount of greenhouse gases released for each bit of energy in fuel, then gradually shave those emissions down 10 percent by 2020.

Fuel producers could choose how to meet the new limits, at first probably by blending in more home-grown fuels such as ethanol, biodiesel or biobutanol, or purchasing credits from producers of lower-carbon fuels, such as electricity for plug-in electric-gas hybrids. In time, they could team with automakers to bolster the supply of hydrogen vehicles, electric cars and similar automobiles.

"Let us use the freedom and the flexibility of the market to accomplish it," Schwarzenegger urged lawmakers Tuesday evening.

Environmentalists called the plan revolutionary, and energy experts said it would be watched closely by policymakers from Washington to London and Berlin, where similar policies are under consideration.

Greenhouse gases from cars, trucks and aircraft are a powerful contributor to global warming, but each mobile source is small and notoriously difficult to regulate. The new policy reaches past those difficulties to take effect at the refinery, the fueling station and perhaps the electrical outlet in the household garage.

Given California's appetite for oil, the policy stands to affect a 10th of the nation's transportation fuel and ease the leading source of greenhouse gases in the world's sixth-largest economy. Those reductions would start at least two years before California launches mandatory cuts in stationary sources of greenhouse gases, such as refineries, cement plants and electrical power plants.

"This is a big deal. This is the world's first greenhouse-gas standard for transportation fuels," said Eric Heitz, president of the Energy Foundation, a San Francisco-based nonprofit group that monitors energy policy. "This policy will be noticed worldwide."

Several experts predicted a flush of capital for California-based green energy technologies and, for consumers, a dazzling menu of automotive choices from plug-in hybrids to cars running on hydrogen, natural gas and plant-derived biofuels — to as many as 7 million more such vehicles in 2020, or 20 times more than are on the road now.

"The policy will motivate new investment in California in alternatives such as biofuel, electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel and related products including electric motors and batteries," said Daniel Sperling, director of the Institute of Transportation Studies at the University of California, Davis.

"It will stimulate the California economy and reduce oil imports," said Sperling, who is analyzing the policy's impact.

Roland Hwang, head of vehicles policy for the Natural Resources Defense Council, planted the idea of a greenhouse standard for fuels with state regulators and the governor's staff.

"What the financial markets will see is a fairly substantial shifting of capital from drilling for more oil to investing in the cleaner fuels of the future," he said.

Oil and gas companies last year opposed legislation locking in broader reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. On Tuesday, some welcomed the state's reliance on market forces in the new policy.

"We're encouraged that this looks like a target that allows for creative solutions," said Catherine Reheis-Boyd, the chief operating officer of the Western States Petroleum Association. "If I understand correctly, we're looking at a market-based approach."

Such an approach, Reheis-Boyd said, would allow the people who produce the fuel and build the engines to come up with their own ways to achieve the target, rather than taking a prescriptive approach dictating specifics such as specific fuel mixes.

Researchers said the policy could create a richer energy landscape, moving from

96 percent reliance on refined oil, overwhelmingly shipped from abroad, to multiple fuels and multiple suppliers.

"This policy will encourage investment in new infrastructure to supply California consumers with fuels," said Alex Ferrell, an assistant professor in the Energy and Resources Group at UC Berkeley and leader of a study on the new fuel standard. "It will be different than the one we have now — it will be owned by different entities like Pacific Ethanol or even Pacific Gas and Electric, who may be encouraged to deliver electricity for plug-in vehicles."

Bill Jones, a former secretary of state and chairman of Pacific Ethanol, with a 40-million gallon ethanol plant in Madera, called the new policy "in fact historic, and it is one of the most comprehensive, well-thought out policies I've ever seen."

Greater fuel diversity and competition could ease Californians' susceptibility to price spikes in gasoline and diesel, Ferrell said.

"By increasing the infrastructure that's available to supply fuels to California consumers, this makes the system less vulnerable to disruption," he said. "By increasing diversity of supply we are reducing the vulnerability in the long run to disruptions in oil prices."

Spare the Air stays despite 'fairly low' effectiveness

By Kiley Russell

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2007

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The commission will work out the details of this year's Spare the Air program in the next few months.

Plan tackles aspects of city's growth

CONCORD: Population to explode by 2030, and officials are already looking at related infrastructure problems

By Tanya Rose

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2007

Contra Costa County's biggest city is getting more of everything in the next 23 years -- jobs, people and the traffic they create.

In 2030, about 17,700 new people will live in Concord, where they will traverse new outdoor trails, work at newly created jobs and further clog up freeways and local thoroughfares such as Ygnacio Valley and Willow Pass roads, according to a new report.

By 2030, there will be 88,800 jobs -- a 46 percent increase. There will be 142,210 people living in Concord, a 14 percent increase from 124,440 today. The new residents will work mostly downtown and in the Monument and Clayton Road corridors -- in retail, service jobs and the finance sector.

And though the plan specifies how the added population will cause more traffic delays during daily commutes, city leaders say they would like to cluster retail and commercial centers near housing hubs to yank cars off the roads.

These are highlights from Concord's draft general plan. The document and its environmental analysis -- weighing in at 4 pounds -- are expected to be approved by the City Council this summer and will provide a blueprint to guide Concord's growth through the next 23 years.

It does not include analysis of the 5,170-acre Concord Naval Weapons Station. That will be added after a separate planning effort for that land is completed.

The newest version of the general plan is available for public input. The commenting period will last until Feb. 21, and on that night the Concord Planning Commission will host a special hearing in which residents will be able to address city leaders.

State law requires such a plan -- last updated by Concord in 1994 -- to serve as a framework for roads, land use and population growth.

"I'd say the major themes are concentrating our housing downtown, closer to where people work, and beefing up retail," said city planner Phillip Woods.

"Concord is pretty much built out, so infill development is and has been really important," Woods said, referring to small vacant parcels throughout town that are being developed, rather than large swaths of land being turned into major construction projects such as in Eastern Contra Costa, for example.

To accommodate the growth, the city plans to widen Ygnacio Valley Road and Monument Boulevard, and fix the Clayton Road-Highway 242 interchange. There are about 15 street-widening projects in all.

However, in some cases, even the improved roads will not be able to handle added vehicles, according to the report. For example, Clayton Road east of Treat Boulevard will have about 2,000 more cars per day than it should have. And though Galindo Street will be able to handle about 31,700 cars, it will have about 40,000 cars per day in 2030. Willow Pass Road will get a makeover but will see much more traffic -- almost twice as much between Diamond Boulevard and Highway 242 compared with today's levels.

Although Interstate 680 and highways 4 and 242 will see added traffic and delays, the plan does not provide solutions.

"Adding lanes would not be feasible because of the high cost, the negative impacts on air quality and other factors," the plan states. The city does not govern freeway improvements, however, and the statewide Metropolitan Transportation Commission has not made commitments to widen freeways in the county.

Therefore, public transit will become crucial in the next 20 years, according to the document. City leaders, it says, should focus on transit "linkages" to North Concord BART and the downtown station, along with bus and other transportation services between employment centers and housing concentrations.

Despite the document's detail, there is barely a mention of the Concord Naval Weapons station, the mothballed military base.

When a first version of the report came out last year, some residents were alarmed to find specific population projections for the weapons station. Many argued that information should be taken out because city officials had been promising that the public would get to plan the base's future uses.

"The city had been saying, 'You as the public get to plan uses for this base,' but then when you looked at the general plan document, it was already laid out in specifics," said Kathy Gleason of the Concord Naval Weapons Station Neighborhood Alliance.

At the public's request, the City Council sent the document back for revisions at a cost of about \$100,000, said Vice Mayor Bill Shinn. Despite the price, Shinn says the change was worth it.

The plan specifies that retail jobs will go up 35 percent and jobs in financial and professional services, health, recreation and education will go up 50 percent. Manufacturing jobs will go up 5 percent. Redevelopment projects in the Monument Corridor and along Willow Pass Road will allow deteriorating spaces to be fixed up and turned into thriving commercial centers, and city leaders will work on zoning the downtown so that it encourages pedestrians.

Another key aspect of the general plan includes adding more parks to the city's existing 636 acres of parkland, so that the total acreage hovers around 850 acres.

MORE INFORMATION

VIEW THE CONCORD GENERAL PLAN: Copies of the Concord General Plan and accompanying environmental report are available at the city's permit center, 1950 Parkside Drive, Building D, or at the Concord Public Library, 2900 Salvio St. Or, buy the documents for \$80 plus \$5 shipping from the city.

COMMENT: Send written comments to Phillip Woods, Principal Planner, 1950 Parkside Drive, Concord, CA 94519. Call 925-671-3284 with questions or e-mail pwoods@ci.concord.ca.us.

MEETING: The Planning Commission will have a public hearing at 7 p.m. Feb. 21 in the City Council chamber, 1950 Parkside Drive, Concord.

Tyson settles environmental lawsuit in Illinois

Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2007

JOSLIN, Ill. - Tyson Foods Inc. and the state of Illinois finalized a settlement Wednesday of a nine-year-old lawsuit regarding alleged air pollution violations at a beef processing plant in northwestern Illinois.

Springdale, Ark.-based Tyson inherited the lawsuit with its 2001 purchase of IBP Inc., including the Joslin beef plant.

Scott Mulford, a spokesman for the Illinois attorney general's office, said Tyson admitted no wrongdoing in the settlement. The lawsuit stemmed from complaints local residents had about offensive odors emanating from the site.

Under the settlement, Tyson said it will fund "six environmentally beneficial projects" with a combined value of \$995,000.

Three of the projects will be in the Quad Cities, about 20 miles from the plant. About \$600,000 of the money will be spent on installing idling reduction technology on Tyson-leased heavy vehicles. The company said it will also install additional odor-reducing technology at the plant and pay a \$30,000 civil penalty.

"We're pleased this long-running legal matter is over and are moving forward with the implementation of additional environmental improvements at the plant," Tyson senior vice president Kevin Igli said in a statement.

Of the other projects Tyson is helping to fund as part of the settlement, \$100,000 will go to Rock Island County schools and \$50,000 will be used for construction of the Quad City Botanical Center Children's Garden in Rock Island.

Another \$100,000 will be given to both the Illinois EPA Special State Projects Trust Fund, and Attorney General State Projects and Court Ordered Distribution Fund.

Tyson said IBP previously took steps to reduce odors coming from the Joslin plant, including covering wastewater treatment lagoons.

The Joslin beef plant produces boxed beef for sale in the United States and abroad to retail, wholesale and foodservice customers. The plant employs about 2,400 workers.

Governor to sign law for air-quality checks at day care centers

Angela Delli Santi, Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2007

TRENTON, N.J. - Gov. Jon S. Corzine planned Thursday to sign into law a measure requiring air-quality monitoring at day care centers across the state during a ceremony in the same Gloucester County town where high levels of mercury were found in one such center.

The law requires the state departments of Health and Environmental Protection to establish air-quality guidelines for day care centers built on or near contaminated sites, and to ensure that the operators meet the standards before the facilities are licensed to open.

Environmental groups criticized lawmakers for removing key provisions from the bill, including one that would have monitored air-quality at all day care centers, not just new ones. But Sen. Fred Madden, whose legislative district includes the stricken sites, called the bill "a significant first step to advancing safety of our children" during legislative hearings in November.

The bill signing was being staged in Franklin Township, the same small southern New Jersey community where more than 30 children were exposed to toxic mercury vapors while attending Kiddie Kollege, a day care on the site of a former thermometer factory. A second center, also closed, was atop a former fuel company. A third sits at a former gas station that has leaking underground tanks.

The state Department of Environmental Protection found mercury levels at Kiddie Kollege were 25 times the allowable limit during a random check of the site in July, prompting the building to be shut. Subsequent tests showed the preschool students had elevated levels of mercury, but officials said the effects of the exposure should not be long-term.

The state filed a lawsuit against the current and former owners of the site last month, claiming that environmental officials have been denied access to the site since Kiddie Kollege closed in August. The families of several children enrolled at Kiddie Kollege have filed their own lawsuits.

The state Attorney General's office is looking into how the center, which opened in 2004, was allowed to operate without a cleanup of the mercury.

Wolf Skacel, assistant DEP commissioner for compliance and enforcement, said the agency has thus far inspected 142 of the 1,400 day cares located within 400 feet of a site that DEP regulates. Those include dry cleaners and other businesses for which the environmental agency issues permits, as well as contaminated sites, Skacel said.

[Lodi News Sentinel, Guest Commentary, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2007](#)

Super-sized homes fuel global warming

Architects step up plans to reduce greenhouse gases in new homes

By Katherine Salant - [Inman News](#)

When parents decide to purchase a new house, they almost always say, "We're doing this for our kids." The new house will be bigger so the children don't have to share bedrooms, they say. It will have a larger yard so there's more room for them to run around. And, it's in a better school district.

In truth, most of the features in the new house -- including its size -- are what mom and dad want. Most kids, though, are reluctant to leave their old neighborhood, and they don't care about what a kitchen looks like or what kind of counters it has. Nor do they get excited about the yard size or the number and size of the bedrooms, unless one is smaller or less appealing in some other way.

But eventually the kids will care a great deal about the choices that mom and dad are making in the new house that affect the environment they will inherit. Our children do not yet know all the ramifications of global warming, but they will never forgive us if they inherit a vastly diminished planet because their parents and grandparents lacked the will to prevent it.

What does a new-home purchase have to do with global warming? Simple: Buildings are the largest source of the greenhouse gas emissions that are causing global warming, and in the United States, half of building-related emissions are from houses.

Greenhouse gases are produced when fossil fuels are burned to produce energy. About one-third of household greenhouse gas emissions are produced "onsite" -- that is, when natural gas or fuel oil is burned at homes to produce heat and hot water. The other two-thirds of household greenhouse gas emissions are produced "offsite" at electric power plants.

About half of electricity in the United States is generated at coal-burning plants, and these are major polluters. Another 20 percent is generated at natural gas-burning plants, which are lesser polluters. About 20 percent is generated by nuclear plants, which do not create emission issues but do generate radioactive waste. Hydro dams, 8 percent, and renewables, 1 percent, do not create any emission issues.

The electricity from the generating plants powers air conditioners, appliances, lights, computers, home-entertainment equipment and other items that we consider essential to our current standard of living. When a household consumes less energy, the greenhouse gas emissions associated with that house are reduced.

Recognizing the connection between global warming and the built environment, architects have stepped up to the plate and adopted what is known as the "2030 Challenge." Originally drafted by Santa Fe architect Ed Mazria and adopted by the American Institute of Architects last year, the 2030 Challenge calls for an immediate 50 percent reduction in fossil-fuel consumption in all new buildings, including houses.

By 2010, the fossil-fuel reduction standard for new building increases to 60 percent, and it will increase by an additional 10 percent every five years. The intended result: By 2030, all newly

constructed buildings will be "carbon neutral." That is, they will operate without reliance on any greenhouse gas-emitting energy source.

According to Mazria, this ambitious program can be implemented at no extra cost by using design strategies, energy-saving materials and construction techniques currently available.

Many homeowners may ask, "What's the rush?" but Mazria cautioned that once the forces causing global warming gain a certain momentum, they cannot be stopped -- if we wait another 10 or 15 years to do something, it may be too late to be effective.

The embrace of the 2030 Challenge by architects is significant because they determine the specifications and materials used in the buildings they design, with input from clients who are paying for the projects.

But architects do not design and spec everything that is built. Their practices, for the most part, deal with industrial, commercial, government and institutional projects. In the single-family housing arena, architects design about one-third of the houses that are built, but they actually write the specs for only about 8 percent of them. Home builders determine the specs for the other 92 percent.

Home builders must follow the energy performance standards mandated by local codes, but these have not yet addressed global-warming issues. At this juncture, any measures taken in this regard are the home builders' call. What actions they take will depend on what they think buyers will pay for.

And that's where mom and dad come in. When they start to insist on energy efficiencies that will reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the house they are buying, the builders will definitely listen.

It's easy for every new-home buyer to say, "What difference will my house make to global warming? It's only one of more than a million that will be built in the next year." True enough -- by itself your house won't make much difference. But if every new-home buyer insists that home builders ratchet up the energy efficiencies in all of the new houses they sell, the difference will be significant.

How ready are mom and dad to step up to the plate? Gopal Ahluwalia, an economist with the National Association of Home Builders who has studied new-home buyer trends for more than 30 years, said that home buyers have some concerns about the environment, but in most cases these are not as yet affecting their home-purchase decisions.

When Ahluwalia asked focus groups considering a new-home purchase whether they would spend an additional \$5,000 to make a \$100,000 house more environmentally benign, only 17 percent of the respondents enthusiastically embraced the idea. Half said they wanted an environmentally friendly home but wouldn't pay more for it, a quarter said their environmental concerns would not affect their housing purchase, and 11 percent said they had no concerns about the environment.

At the same time, Ahluwalia said that the "must-have" features for most new-home buyers increase the energy use of the household. For example, most buyers want higher ceilings to create the illusion of a bigger house, even though raising the ceiling from 8 feet to 9 feet increases the volume of space to be heated and cooled by 12.5 percent.

Raising the ceiling to 10 feet, an increasingly popular option in some markets, increases the volume of air to be conditioned by 25 percent.

Everybody wants a two-story foyer to impress their guests, and this also adds to the volume of the house. Fireplaces send heat right up the chimney, and buyers' insistence on flooding their rooms with natural light means lots of windows that can't capture heat as well as a solid wall can.

Somewhat contradictorily, buyers do pay attention to conventional energy-saving features such as windows with dual panes, low-emission glass (which has a thin metal coating that reduces heat loss), and added insulation in the walls. But Ahluwalia said that buyers' interests do not extend to features that they consider exotic -- for example, a 90 percent efficient gas furnace or blown-in cellulose insulation that will plug up air leaks that cause uncomfortable drafts in the winter.

The easiest way for homeowners to reduce their fossil-fuel consumption is to buy a smaller house, but so far this idea has had no traction at all. Buyers are still fixated on more space, although the rate at which house size is increasing has slowed, Ahluwalia said. As of July 2006, it had increased less than 1 percent above the 2005 average size of 2,436 square feet.

Large houses over 3,000 square feet still command 20 percent of the market, but Ahluwalia said that the number of mega-houses in the 7,500-square-foot to 10,000-square-foot range has slowed.

The attraction of the very large houses is not the added function, Ahluwalia said. The attitude of the buyers seems to be: "I can afford it, so why not?"

Perhaps global warming is the reason to change course.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2007:](#)

Blueprint for Valley

Area residents can have their voices heard on plans for future.

You think you know what the Valley should look like in the next half-century? Well, don't keep it to yourself. Share it with everyone else, by joining in the Valley Blueprint 2050 workshop tonight.

The blueprint process — which seeks to set broad guidelines rather than hard-and-fast rules and regulations — is a project under way in all eight counties of the central San Joaquin Valley. The Fresno County version will be the subject of tonight's workshop at the University of California Center.

The Valley's population is expected to double over the next four decades, to something approaching 7 million people. Where will they live? Where will they work? What sort of parks and recreational amenities will they need? Libraries? Schools? Neighborhoods?

Should the emphasis, for instance, be on preserving farm lands? Should we be more focused on streets and highways, or does mass transit deserve a higher priority? Where does the revitalization of downtown Fresno fit into the larger scheme of things? What sort of housing should we be building — traditional large-lot suburban tract homes or the denser apartments, lofts and condos more typical of larger urban areas?

How will we guarantee plenty of clean water for future uses? What more should we be doing to clean up the Valley's air? What kind of land use policies best serve those ends?

Special interests have little problem getting the ears of policy-makers. Here's a chance for the rest of the public to have an impact. If the voices are sufficient in number and volume, they will be heard above the whispers — however seductive — of the special interests.

The Council of Fresno County Governments is coordinating the local blueprint. The process is mostly funded by a grant from the state Business, Transportation and Housing Agency.

All eight county blueprints will be folded into a valleywide version by the Great Valley Center in Modesto.

Don't get left out. Go on record. Speak your piece. Elected officials will be listening — especially if the voices are many.

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Wed., Jan. 10, 2007:](#)

A tailpipe war

GOV. ARNOLD Schwarzenegger is stepping up one of his popular holy wars: a battle against greenhouse gases spewing from California tailpipes. Tucked in his State of the State address last night was a plan to pour alternative fuels into Californian's gas tanks.

The move has the potential to raise prices, if suppliers can't be found. But the governor's team believes a raft of options and choices will soften this worry, spur new jobs and clean up the state's famously dirty air. It has the added potential of jump-starting exportable clean-air technology, cutting oil imports and putting the state in the forefront of the climate-change fight.

It's a tall order. But it's the path that the governor and the Legislature clearly chose after passing sweeping greenhouse-gas controls last year. In his speech, Schwarzenegger aims to cut 10 percent of the greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, from emissions by wider use of alternative fuels. These low-polluting sources include ethanol, hydrogen, electricity and natural gas -- just about any source except dead-dinosaur petroleum.

The change won't come overnight. The mandate will be phased in by 2020 and aims to create a competitive market that will offer drivers lots of choices. Hybrid cars, propane-run delivery trucks and the talked-up return of electric cars could all be part of the picture.

If 10 percent sounds small, consider that 40 percent of the state's greenhouse gases are spewed by motor vehicles. It's the biggest single source of such emissions, and slicing off a tenth of the problem should make a difference.

The governor needs to make sure this plan operates smoothly. The result for California could be a blue-sky victory.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2007:](#)

'The scientific consensus'

Casting himself as an objective observer, Ed Forbes (letter Jan. 6) rather cleverly frames two questions to make it appear as if skepticism regarding global warming can still be justified. But what he forgets to explain is that neither the questions or the answers he provides actually contradict one another.

Instead of worrying how to answer the misleading questions of a partisan like Mr. Forbes, citizens should make it their business to know the actual scientific consensus: what the facts are, what should be done.

That's easy to discover. The scientific academies of all the G8 nations (as well as those of Brazil, China and India) have since 2005 endorsed a joint statement on climate change. This document, available on the Internet, urges governments to acknowledge the very real threat posed by climate change and, among other recommendations, to substantially reduce net global greenhouse gas emissions, a major driver of this change.

Since this is, in fact, the scientific consensus, I ask Mr. Forbes if he expects us to believe that highly exclusive and inherently conservative bodies like the Royal Society or the National Academy of Sciences' are "special interest groups"? Please!

Scott Hatfield, Fresno