

Dairy air quality study continues to feed dispute

Bob Browne

[Tracy Press, Tuesday, July 12, 2005](#)

MODESTO — Support and skepticism greeted air quality regulators' recent estimate of air pollution from cows.

David Crow, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District, said his calculation of smog-forming gases is an attempt to apply the best available research in a field where the research is incomplete.

He heard reactions to his recommended "emissions factor for dairies" during a workshop in Fresno on Monday afternoon. People in Modesto and Bakersfield also participated by way of a video teleconference in the air district's offices.

Those pushing for cleaner air said the district should use all the research it can, with the understanding that pending research will change the district's estimates of dairy pollution.

"The dairy industry wants better science all the time. That's a great tactic to delay implementation of controls," said Tom Frantz, president of the Association of Irrigated Residents, which pressures all industry in the southern San Joaquin Valley to clean up air pollution.

Agriculture advocates said they want to do their part but don't want regulations that will require expensive changes to their farms with little assurance that they will actually clean the air.

"All parties need to know that the measures dairy farmers have to do and changes they have to make will work and help improve air quality," said Paul Martin, director of environmental services for Western United Dairymen in Modesto.

The district's latest report, released two weeks ago, estimates that each of California's 1.4 million milk cows produces 20.6 pounds of volatile organic compounds each year. VOCs mix with nitrogen oxides on hot days to produce ozone, which health experts blame for asthma and other respiratory ailments.

A new law last year ended a state exemption that allowed dairies to operate without permits from their local air pollution control districts. The new figure on air pollution from cows will help the district and dairy industry define the scope of the problem and possible solutions.

Crow said researchers and members of the district's Dairy Permitting Advisory Group agreed that volatile organic compounds include a wide range of chemicals from different sources, such as cows, feedlots and manure.

"The DPAC found there was no one research study that covered all of the processes on a dairy," Crow said. So he took data from 15 different studies, mostly from California but some from overseas.

He also made note of public comment Monday and will make a formal recommendation by Aug. 1 for the district board to consider for go-ahead.

The figures for volatile fatty acids from manure slurry ponds make up the most contentious part of the dispute. Frank Mitloehner, a researcher from the University of California, Davis, who contributed to the studies used by the district, said even his own research on these gases is inconclusive.

"We have not found correct numbers and are not aware of anyone who has found correct numbers in the United States," Mitloehner said.

The district gained much of its data on these chemicals from a study by English researcher Phil Hobbs, a point of dispute among interested parties.

"All of my colleagues, all of the researchers say the conclusions made in the Hobbs study are too far-reaching," Mitloehner said. "In my view, the use of the Hobbs study to estimate emissions from California dairies is not valid."

Both sides take aim at dairy figure

Number that would affect regulations called too low, too high at meeting

By CHRISTINE BEDELL, Californian staff writer

[Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, July 12, 2005](#)

FRESNO -- In the words of one participant, late in the afternoon: "Holy cow."

More than 40 people in three cities including Bakersfield debated a highly technical but hugely important environmental question Monday: how much smog-creating gases come from dairy cows.

David Crow, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, recently pegged the number at 20.6 pounds per cow a year.

Monday's talk sounded a lot like the Goldilocks story. Dairymen said the number's too high, environmentalists said it's too low and another group said it's about right -- for now.

Under a legal settlement between the government and dairy industry, Crow must come up with a number by Aug. 1. Officials will use it to help determine how to regulate dairies in the future.

Crow took testimony at a packed meeting of some 175 people in Fresno plus from some of dozens more who participated via satellite from Bakersfield and Modesto.

Asked if Monday's debate swayed him either way, Crow said he still has written comments to read and will continue taking public comment until July 25.

But he did say, in a question about the science he's using, "We are comfortable that what we're looking at is reasonable and prudent."

Scores of dairy representatives said 75 percent of Crow's estimate is based on incomplete science. They've said each dairy cow creates more like 5.6 pounds of smog-producing gases each year.

Dairy folks said Crow used too much information from Britain where dairy practices are different, discounted California-based research and is contradicted by experts hired by this state's universities and air protection officials.

"The (San Joaquin Valley) district appears to be ignoring the voices of these researchers just when the district most needs to listen to them," said J.P. Cativiela of Community Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship.

Denise Mullinax of Hilmar Cheese Co. said her industry is willing to do its part to clean up the air but the "path you're going down is not scientifically sound."

"We're not looking for a 'Get out of jail free' card," she said.

Pixley dairy farmer Joey Airoso said his industry is being regulated to death.

"Maybe food will be like fuel. Where will it come from? The Middle East?"

On the other side, Bakersfield resident Bill Descary called Crow's number "logical and fair" and "a good indication of where research stands."

Crow rightly used the phrase "to be determined" in detailing what aspects of dairying create what gases, he said.

"It is irresponsible to say the district is dead wrong," Descary said.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, who wrote a new law subjecting dairies to regulation, said through a letter read Monday that Crow's estimate is "reasonable" and a "strong starting point."

Like just about everybody, including Crow, Florez called for more research into dairy polluting.

And Tom Frantz, president of Association of Irrigated Residents, said the dairy industry's "lack of science" argument is just a tactic to delay dairy regulation.

Frantz, who's from Kern County, was part of the crowd saying Crow's number is too low, as did Brent Newell, an attorney with the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

Newell highlighted what valley air officials had said earlier in the meeting -- that Crow's number left out pollution from such things as land application of manure and feed storage.

The 20.6 estimate would make cows worse for valley air than cars and light trucks, the district has said. The figure is also 60 percent higher than previously thought.

Environmentalists say the true number is more like 35 to 40 pounds.

The emissions estimate will help determine how many dairies in the eight-county valley will need air district permits. The Kern County Board of Supervisors also is expected to use the information to, among other things, see if the area can take a big uptick in cows.

Kern now has about 297,000 dairy cattle. Three dairies with roughly 14,900 cows have been approved but not yet constructed while 19 dairies that also may come here would add some 173,000 cows to Kern.

Famers Say Pollution Study Flawed

Bob Hensley

[Script from Capital Public Radio, aired Tuesday, July 12, 2005](#)

There are two and a half million cows in the Central Valley. Previous studies found each one generated about 13 pounds of gas annually that creates ozone smog. Now, the San Joaquin Valley Air pollution Control Board says recent studies show cows create 20 pounds of gas each year. Farmers aren't happy because the higher threshold would require many of them to spend additional money on pollution control measures. At a hearing in Fresno, farmers and dairy advocates said the new numbers are suspect. J.P. Cativiela is with the pro-farm group Dairy Cares.

"More than three-quarters of the dairy emission factor proposed by your district completely lacks scientific basis. Setting emission factors on information that is known to be flawed, helps no one." The Control District says it stands by the numbers, but hasn't ruled out adjusting the emissions threshold. A final decision is expected by August first. If approved, agriculture officials say the new requirements would affect about a quarter of the region's 15-hundred dairies.

Arguing over methane matters

Farmers, officials disagree on amount of pollution caused by dairy cows

DANA NICHOLS - Record Staff Writer

[Stockton Record, Tuesday, July 12, 2005](#)

Even the cows may end up unhappy when officials decide how much smog comes from the San Joaquin Valley's 2.5 million dairy cattle.

The bitter debate over methane and other gases released by cows and their waste reached a crescendo Monday during a workshop before top officials of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Farmers accused district officials of betraying their once cordial relationship by inflating estimates of how much pollution cows spew. Clean air advocates said the pollution estimate should be higher. And district officials stood by a figure that they admitted was probably low and is based as much on "judgment" as on hard science.

Air Pollution Control District Executive Director David Crow acknowledged that more research is needed, but he defended his proposed estimate that each dairy cow in the Valley produces 20.6 pounds of smog-causing gasses each year, a figure that would put cows among the biggest sources of Valley smog.

Under a legal settlement with dairy operators, Crow is required by Aug. 1 to make an official estimate based on the best available scientific information.

"We clearly intend to be fair. We intend to be as accurate as the science allows us to be. And we intend to meet our obligations," Crow said.

The stakes are high for everyone. Farmers fear being forced to buy expensive new equipment to control air pollution. Cows might be forced to eat different foods to make them less flatulent.

And people whose lungs are now damaged by smog stand to benefit if the district can substantially cut the smog-producing chemicals released by dairy herds.

The advisory committee that air district officials formed to review the science failed miserably to reach a consensus.

Instead, the group splintered into factions, with dairy groups saying that individual cows should get credit for only 5.6 pounds of smog-causing pollution a year. Clean air advocates said the figure should be 38.2 pounds.

Without a consensus, Crow reviewed the studies and came up with his own estimate released last month.

Dairy interests and a number of California scientists who have worked on the issue accused Crow of ignoring their warnings about problems with the studies used to justify his proposed estimate.

Frank Mitloehner, an animal science air quality specialist at University of California, Davis, said Crow based his estimate too much on a study of British dairies that handle their waste in ways that are different than practices in California.

"I have problems with that. My colleagues have problems with that as well," said Mitloehner, who added that one of his own studies was used incorrectly by Crow in coming up with the air district's pollution estimate.

Clean air advocates speaking before the workshop accused scientists of being in bed with dairy interests.

"I think scientists need to remain objective scientists, present their data and not take sides in this debate," said Brent Newell, a staff attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

Newell said that dairy industry calls for more research are a delaying tactic.

"Their sound science is what sounds good to them," he said.

Politicians have been weighing into the fight too. State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, sent a letter supporting Crow's estimate.

Other Valley legislators, including Assembly members Barbara Matthews, D-Tracy; Greg Nakanishi, R-Lodi; Greg Aghazarian, R-Stockton; and Guy Houston, R-Livermore; signed a letter blasting Crow's estimate as too high. Reps. Richard Pombo, R-Tracy, and Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, also opposed the 20.6 pound estimate.

Meanwhile, dairy farmers wait for the number. The higher it is, the more they will likely be forced to do to try to cut pollution.

"We want to know the real pounds of VOCs volatile organic compounds dairies put out," said Ann Silva, co-owner of the 750-cow Bacchetti & Silva Dairy near Tracy.

Although the new air pollution regulations for dairies that are due in 2006 will initially apply only to operations with 1,000 or more cows, Silva said she believes the air district will ultimately crack down on smaller operations, too.

And that will likely mean purchasing equipment, like a methane digester to capture gas coming off of manure.

"We are looking at a price tag of between \$500,000 and one million dollars," she said.

School flags to warn of bad air

Modesto district will use colored banners to track quality; red means danger

Elizabeth Johnson

[Modesto Bee, Tuesday, July 12, 2005](#)

Modesto City Schools will unfurl color-coded flags that tell students, parents and staff what the air quality is each day, the school board unanimously decided Monday.

Beginning next month, the district with its 33 schools will be the first in Stanislaus County to fly the "asthma-friendly" flags as a way to raise awareness about air quality and breathing problems.

Flags will come in four colors, with green representing the best conditions and red representing the worst. They will hang below the American and California banners on flagpoles.

The colors will be based on an air quality index issued by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The Bee uses the same reporting system on its Weather page.

"Some people don't read the newspaper and don't check the air quality," said Rebecca Nuñez-Gonsalves, whose asthmatic child attends Rose Avenue Elementary School in Modesto. "The kids are out there playing all the time. It's good to know."

An estimated 22,000 adults and 12,000 children in Stanislaus County have asthma. About 5,000 people have emphysema and more than 14,000 have chronic bronchitis.

The flags will start flying in August - the first campus has yet to be determined - and are expected to spread to all the district's schools by the end of November, said Shari Lowe, the district's head nurse.

She anticipates the flags will help reduce the number of absences because parents will feel more comfortable sending their children to schools that are cognizant of asthma sufferers and their needs. The district plans to compare last school year's attendance to this year's.

Merced already using system

The asthma-friendly flags program was proposed by the Stanislaus County Asthma Coalition, and MedicAlert of Turlock is picking up the \$20,000 to \$25,000 cost.

The idea is to have one hoisted at each of the county's 245 private and public schools. Similar programs are used at schools in Merced, Mariposa, Tulare and Fresno counties.

Teresa Ramos keeps informed of the air quality and tells her son, Joey, a fifth-grader at Kirschen Elementary School in Modesto, when he can't play outside.

But Joey said he would find the flags helpful because he said he can't tell when the air quality is poor.

Joey said if he were to see a flag indicating unhealthy air, he would make sure to drink plenty of water and stay in the shade.

The Modesto City Schools Board of Education is the first in Stanislaus County to adopt the program, and Dr. Wallace Carroll, the asthma coalition's chairman, said he believes others will follow suit. Carroll said the flags also will serve the broader community, which will see them in front of the schools.

Several school board members expressed concern that people would be confused - or, worse, alarmed if they saw a red flag in front of the school.

The flags also will bear a few words describing what the color means. Carroll later added that Merced has not had problems.

In late April, the American Lung Association gave failing grades to Stanislaus, Merced, Tuolumne, San Joaquin and Calaveras counties in its State of the Air 2005 report.

The report lists Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin among counties with the worst air in the nation for smog and particle pollution.

Carroll estimated that about half of all school absences are due to asthma.

Even so, the air isn't bad every day, he pointed out. Last school year, there were seven "orange" days - the second-worst condition - all in January, February and March, and one "red" day in November.

Sierra Club lauds hybrid SUV

[from the Associated Press, In the Modesto Bee, Tuesday, July 12, 2005](#)

DETROIT - The Sierra Club, a longtime foe of Ford Motor Co., applauded the automaker Monday for releasing its second hybrid vehicle and said it will market the sport utility vehicle to its members.

Lincoln Mercury division spokeswoman Sara Tatchio said Ford already had received 27 orders for the Mercury Mariner Hybrid by early Monday afternoon. The SUV will be sold almost exclusively online. Customers can order the vehicles through Mercury's Web site and pick them up from a local dealer.

The San Francisco-based Sierra Club said it will tell its members about the Mariner Hybrid and offer test drives at its annual summit in September. It's a change of pace for the environmental group, which ran ads two years ago criticizing Ford's environmental record. At the time, the club said Ford's 95-year-old Model T was more fuel efficient than the Ford Explorer SUV.

"For years, the Sierra Club has pressured Ford to make more fuel-efficient cars and trucks," said Dan Becker, director of the Sierra Club's global warming program. "They are now beginning to do that, and we want to help them succeed."

The Mariner Hybrid's fuel economy is nearly 50percent higher than a conventional Mariner, Ford said. The Mariner Hybrid gets an estimated 33 miles per gallon in the city and 29 mpg on the highway.

Not all environmental groups are satisfied. The San Francisco-based Rainforest Action Network said it will run a newspaper ad in a few weeks targeting Ford for having the least fuel-efficient fleet of all the major automakers.

The 2006 Mercury Mariner Hybrid SUV starts at \$29,840, or \$4,190 more than a Mariner with a traditional engine and a luxury trim package.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Tuesday, July 12, 2005:](#)

Industry has a cow over air district

By Marylee Shrider, Californian staff columnist

It's official, sort of. Dairy cows are the biggest polluters in the Central Valley, far surpassing cars and trucks.

Quick -- you get the tar, I'll bring the feathers.

But before we run every last dairy cow out of town, can we slow down for a second to consider the method behind the San Joaquin Valley Air District's madness?

The dairy industry is fuming over the air board's latest announcement and who can blame them?

Just a few months ago, in late January, milk producers were reveling in early results from a University of California Davis study that showed dairy cows produce only half the amount of air pollution as was previously believed.

A study funded, in part, by the air district.

Now, air-quality regulators say that study was only one of 15 considered in the district's final pollution-per-cow estimations that will impact how dairies operate in California.

Those estimations were passionately debated Monday during a public hearing at the district's Fresno headquarters, where the air district, environmental groups and dairy lobbyists couldn't find an emissions factor everyone liked.

At issue are the studies on smog-forming gases the dairies produce. With some 3 million dairy cows in the state -- 297,000 of those in Kern County -- there's plenty of gas to study.

But not nearly as much as some want to believe, says Frank Mitloehner, the UC Davis air quality specialist whose research is cited in the air district's emissions proposal.

Mitloehner says the air district's proposed emission factor of 20.6 pounds per cow, per year is grossly overestimated and based, at least in part, on incomplete research findings he "strongly cautioned" the agency not to use.

"I advised them in two public meetings and once in writing against using it because they would get inaccurate conclusions that were not supported by the university or myself," Mitloehner said. Mitloehner says he and other colleagues who conducted the bulk of the California studies, and whose methods were approved by the air district, reported smog-forming emissions of no more than 3 pounds per head per year. Allowing for some wiggle room, Mitloehner says an emissions factor of 5.6 is a fair place to start, while environmentalists are at opposing end of the spectrum, pushing a factor of 38.2.

What really ticks off the dairy folks is the inclusion in the study of research conducted outside California -- in Texas and England. It's a major sticking point with local dairymen like George Borba, who question how dairy conditions in California compare to those in Great Britain. Borba, owner of one of Kern County's biggest dairies with about 4,500 dairy cows, said he wonders why air regulators decided to throw "homegrown information" out the window. "It's not site specific," he said. "Let's listen to our California scientists who have spent many hours and many dollars studying the problem."

But the clock is running for the air district, which is mandated by law to come up with the definitive emissions number by Aug. 1. Air district officials say they are accustomed to working under tight deadlines and feel no pressure to produce a final number. But air officials expect the numbers to go "either way" and will "be adjusted as appropriate" as results from ongoing studies come in.

In the meantime, they're happy with the numbers they have, thank you very much. This act-now-apologize-later tack suits valley environmentalists -- heck, it's practically their motto. And the finger-pointing will no doubt comfort valley dwellers who feel just a wee bit o' guilt when tooling down 99 in gas-gobbling Hummers and SUVs.

The problem is, an inflated emissions factor will only force milk producers to spend thousands of dollars and countless man-hours chasing down emissions that don't really exist. They'll be rounding up ghostly gases while the rest of us are still driving to Pismo for a breath of fresh air. Let's slow down. Let's listen to the scientists behind the science. Let's find a factor that will actually help us all breathe a bit easier.

[Modesto Bee, Letters to the Editor, Tuesday, July 12, 2005](#)

Special Topic: Methane Pollution

Valley's ag pride in peril

In reference to "Cows in the valley cause more pollution than cars, study says" (June 29, Page D-1): I'd like to challenge the people who came up with this information to enclose yourself in a shop with a cow and at the same time, have someone enclose themselves in a similar shop with a car or truck running. Then let me know the results.

What has happened to the great farming areas of California, as well as the pride in being a farmer? Someday, we will be shipping all our food products in from countries where we have no idea what is sprayed on them, not to mention the cost.

Also, when all the good farmland is under pavement, then we will know the real reason we have pollution, as well as why we have a shortage of water.

Wake up, California, especially all of you who live in the beautiful, fertile San Joaquin Valley.

STEVE HOFMAN

Ripon

Cows full of chemicals

I read with interest about the cow problem. With all the chemicals in their food and ground, I can see why the poor animals would be a problem. Back in the old days, the animals had good green grass and grain, all natural. The Lord gave us the animals, we should take good care of them. We have to be careful now what we eat. No more bean soup or my favorite, baked beans. Who knows what's next?

I take all of this with a grain of salt, full of chemicals.

SISTER MARIETTA WHALEY

Modesto

Extremists tainted study

Responding to The Bee's editorial ("Ag groups should fund better pollution studies," July 1) regarding pollution studies seems like trying to teach preschool children common sense. Yes, the price of milk is up. Fantastic. Why didn't you mention the recent 24-month period when dairymen were losing \$1 to \$1.75 per cow per day and that it will take them years to recover those losses?

I doubt there is a university study that backs up the environmentalists' claims. The environmentalists probably did a study, then doubled the results. As for Congressman Dennis Cardoza's comments, isn't it great that he has spoken the truth? He knows about environmentalists after dealing with the lunatic fringe over the UC Merced issues. If the Bee newspapers and these extreme environmentalists keep fooling around with our food supply, no one will want to be a food provider or food processor in California or the United States. As an ex-banker, I'm sure that industry is watching the proceedings, and one of these days they won't want to provide credit to agriculture or food processors.

LLOYD VIERRA
Gustine

Editor's Note: The report from the Dairy Permitting Advisory Group of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is available at: www.valleyair.org/busind/pto/dpag/dpag_idx.htm
<http://www.valleyair.org/busind/pto/dpag/dpag_idx.htm>.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, July 12, 2005:](#)

G-8 debate

Blair leads despite tragic explosion, yet Bush balks.

The terrorist attacks in London last week were a tragic distraction from the annual summit meeting of the major industrial countries in Scotland. But prospects for a breakthrough against global warming and African poverty were never bright. President Bush made sure of that.

Before the Group of Eight meeting, U.S. negotiators succeeded in watering down the language of the communiqué on global warming. The result was broad acknowledgment, for the first time by Bush, that global warming is a problem to which human activity is a contributing factor.

But the president still refused to embrace the goals of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, already agreed to by Europe, to make specified greenhouse gas emission reductions by 2012. But the G-8 did agree to begin global talks later this year that will include China and India, major polluters that are now exempt from such goals.

Nor would Bush agree to raise overall U.S. development aid to 0.7% of gross domestic product by 2010, a pledge already made by European countries. Even doubling the U.S. share, now about 0.16%, would still leave it below half the target level set by the United Nations in 1970.

But there were some gains. About \$40 billion in debt relief, a modest share of poor countries' debt, was agreed to; British Prime Minister Tony Blair, despite having to cope with the London bombings, won a collective promise to double aid to Africa, from \$25 billion a year to \$50 billion by 2010. Leaders also pledged \$9 billion over three years to the Palestinian Authority to cover transition costs of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and areas of the West Bank. No one expected this year's G-8 summit to achieve the ambitious goals set by Blair. Nor should anyone expect Bush to go much further than he has. But Blair has set an example for others to follow. Indeed, other countries and many corporations, among them some U.S. firms, already are acting to curb global warming.

To be fair, Bush has done much to increase U.S. aid to fight poverty, especially in Africa. What's still missing is the leadership for which American presidents were once known. Thankfully, Tony Blair has assumed that role.