

[Fresno Bee - June 1, 2004 \(also published in the Modesto Bee\)](#)

## **Farm pollution monitored from cities - San Joaquin Valley growers must cut dust plumes in July.**

By Mark Grossi

When a new air quality rule starts forcing San Joaquin Valley growers to hold down dust plumes in July, nobody will check farmland pollution monitors for improvement. Why? Because there are no farmland monitors.

Instead, air monitors in cities -- miles away from most farms -- will tell authorities whether the 8,000 growers involved in the cleanup are successful. It is one example of the way things work in the world of air science and government regulation, where estimates and indirect information can dominate conclusions.

As Valley growers reduce their tilling, water unpaved roads and cut back on crop burning, questions are bound to surface about how air officials will measure results, many believe. Growers want to make sure investments in pollution control are not wasted. "We are interested in seeing the most accurate numbers possible," said Debbie Jacobsen, president of the Fresno County Farm Bureau. "I think everyone wants that, and I'm sure every effort is being made."

But with basically city monitoring for the 25,000-square-mile Valley basin, there is no way to directly measure pollution from fields. Officials explain that they monitor urban centers -- Fresno, Bakersfield, Modesto -- because that's where people live and breathe. Air experts know autumn is the biggest season for dust-borne particle pollution from farms. At that time, city monitors show increases in dust specks, which are less than one-seventh of the width of a human hair.

So San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials are confident they will have evidence of farm reductions, even though science still has difficulty distinguishing between dust specks from a city field or a farm field. Farming is the major contributor of this pollution in fall, officials said. "We'll be able to tell if it's working," said Dave Mitchell, planning manager for the district. "We will see levels go down if it is working."

The district quotes a number for the expected reduction of potentially dangerous particles, or particulate matter, from farm dust -- 34 tons a day. But a more basic question: Without farm monitors, does anyone really know how much air pollution is coming from agriculture each day? The answer is not simple.

Academic and government researchers study the amount of dust-borne specks created during land preparation and harvest. Cotton harvesting makes 3.4 pounds of particle pollution per acre, and almond harvesting creates almost 41 pounds per acre.

Using the estimates, state and local air officials figure pollution totals for various harvest and land preparation seasons, multiplying acreage by the number of pounds per acre for each crop. They determined farms produce about half of the particulate matter in the Valley, totaling more than 160 tons per day.

As with any other calculation in a political arena, people argue about it.

A researcher with the U.S. Department of Agriculture challenges the numbers. Michael Buser of the Agriculture Research Service in Texas said he believes the estimates are overstated because of sampling equipment limitations in the past. It is time for an update, he said.

"Not only are ag operators being forced to put on more controls, they're being held accountable for pollution that's coming from another source," he said. "We're hoping to lower the emission factors, but it takes time."

State officials, who have heard Buser's pitch, said they don't have enough evidence yet to make changes.

Academics see other complications. The formulas need to incorporate soil moisture and texture, they said. Dry and silty soils kick up more pollution, so the experts need to incorporate those factors into estimates.

Researchers also wrestle with the idea of exactly where to measure the dust. Should they measure at the edge of the field or right behind the land leveler or the harvester?

Some believe the edge of the field is better because many dust specks fall to the ground before even leaving the field. Soil scientist Randy Southard, a professor at the University of California at Davis, disagrees. "I prefer to focus on the implement because that's where the particulate problem is happening," Southard said. "The analogy I use is measuring at the smokestack for a factory versus going to the Canadian border and measuring it. I think you want to measure it at the smokestack. "The point is, we want to discover tools we can give to growers to improve air quality. It's a good, meaty research issue, and more work is needed."

The reporter can be reached at [mgrossi@fresnobee.com](mailto:mgrossi@fresnobee.com) <<mailto:mgrossi@fresnobee.com>> or (559) 441-6316.

[Fresno Bee - Tuesday, June 1, 2004](#)

Letter to the Editor

### **There is much we all can do to help clean the Valley's air**

With the summer heat around the corner and so many negative stories in the news about poor quality air, it is a good time to remind readers of positive steps we all can take to reduce respiratory problems in our geographically challenged Valley:

Those with small or average size lawns could consider using a push mower and hand edger. Rake leaves instead of using a gas-powered blower. During the summer, the exhaust and dust from blowers can stay in our air for weeks.

When painting a house, consider using a roller and brush (or hire someone who does) instead of a paint sprayer, which can produce tiny particles that can affect an entire neighborhood and beyond. When buying spray paint in cans, consider brush-on instead. Low VOC (volatile organic compound) formulas are available in many products. Read labels.

Walk, skateboard, bike, carpool or use mass transit. Look around at all of the vehicles carrying only one person. If it's just one person going somewhere, think about creative ways of reaching the destination. Those in the market for a new car might consider a high-mileage car or a hybrid. Even 4-stroke scooters and motorcycles are an energy-efficient way of getting around.

Be happy about the contributions we are making to easier breathing, and spread the word that the infamous designation of "second worst air in the nation" has the potential of becoming merely a temporary label in the history of our Valley.

Brian Gibson  
Fresno

[Los Angeles Times - June 1, 2004](#)

Letter to the Editor

### **'Weekend Smog' as Part of the Bigger Picture**

Re "As Smog Thickens So Does the Debate," May 24: Your story on "weekend smog" missed several key points. Ozone smog is not our only air-quality problem. Fine-particulate pollution, also known as PM2.5, creates hazy vistas and is an equal if not greater threat to health. It has been linked to a wide range of health effects from increased hospital admissions to early deaths. Since

a major portion of PM2.5 is composed of nitrogen compounds, we cannot reduce PM2.5 levels without reducing nitrogen-oxide emissions.

Although weekend ozone levels for the last 35 years have been as high as or higher than the levels on weekdays, weekend air quality has improved significantly, at nearly the same rate as that during weekdays. Last summer was a notable exception, primarily because the weather was hotter and more stagnant than it has been for years, resulting in a higher number of smoggy days on weekdays and weekends.

Following the recommendation of auto manufacturers and a few scientists to slow down nitrogen-oxide emission reductions will not significantly benefit ozone air quality and would delay reductions in PM2.5 pollution. That could mean additional smog-related illnesses and deaths.

Barry R. Wallerstein, Executive Officer  
South Coast Air Quality Management District - Diamond Bar

[Tri-Valley Herald - May 29, 2004 - 3:11:30 AM PST \( also published in the S.F. Chronicle & Hanford Sentinel\)](#)

#### **Dairy leaders sue air district**

By Associated Press

Dairy leaders in the San Joaquin Valley sued the regional air district over a new program that gives dairies one month to apply for pollution-control permits. The two groups -- the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution control District and the dairy owners -- disagree on the interpretation of a state law that ended agriculture's decades-long exemption from having to apply for air pollution control permits.

The air district is asking farms and dairies that each emit more than 12.5 tons of pollution-forming chemicals a year to apply for a permit by July 1. In the valley, this would affect 1,000 dairies with more than 1,954 cows each and as many as 4,000 farms larger than 300 acres that use internal-combustion engines.

The \$4 billion California dairy industry argues that it should not have to apply for the permits until an emission study by the California Air Resources Board is completed, the air district reviews the information and develops regulations. That would push the deadline until July 1, 2006. "The tactic that the air pollution control district has taken does not appear to be consistent with the law," said Michael Marsh, chief executive officer of Western United Dairymen, one of the plaintiffs

[San Francisco Chronicle - June 1, 2004](#)

#### **New legislative proposals to regulate California businesses**

New legislative proposals to regulate California businesses:

- \* Raise California's minimum wage by \$1 per hour, to \$7.75 hourly. AB2832.
- \* Charge toxic chemical manufacturers and distributors new fees to finance \$12 million program to monitor toxic chemicals in Californians' bodies. SB1168.
- \* Charge recycling fee to manufacturers and distributors of fluorescent lamps. SB1180.
- \* Make cell phone retailers establish recycling program to keep old phones out of landfills. AB2901.
- \* Keep intact most provisions of a new law allowing employers to sue their bosses over a wide range of workplace violations. SB1809.
- \* Allow workers to sue employers for failing to take reasonable steps to protect them from harassment by customers and clients. AB2889.

- \* Stop state from contracting with businesses that move jobs to foreign countries. AB1829.
- \* Prevent Wal-Mart from sponsoring local ballot initiatives claiming a project will be exempt from state environmental laws if passed. AB3090.
- \* Make employers notify employees when they monitor their e-mail or other Internet activity. SB1841.
- \* Ban teenagers from tanning salons without a doctor's prescription. AB2193.
- \* Make businesses tell the state how many of their workers are in other states and countries. AB3021.
- \* Require double fines for employers that fail to provide workers with adequate exits from workplace. AB2545.
- \* Make new cars sold in California contain labels telling buyers how much global warming gases the vehicle produces. AB2906.
- \* Prevent growth of Long Beach and San Pedro ports if growth adds air pollution in Southern California. AB2042.
- \* Ban car rental companies from using ge positioning systems to track drivers. AB2840.
- \* Ban fishermen from bottom trawling in coastal waters. SB1459.
- \* Stop banks from charging fees to cash paychecks issued by their clients. SB1904.
- \* Let counties impose \$2 fee on real estate transactions to pay for programs to fight elder abuse. AB2783.

[Merced Sun-Star - Last Updated: May 31, 2004, 09:30:28 AM PDT](#)

#### **Valley air: Discounts available on lawnmowers**

Discount coupons are available to encourage Valley residents to opt for air-friendly lawnmowers. The program comes just in time for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's ninth Spare the Air season, starting June 8.

While supplies last, any resident of the district's eight counties can receive a coupon for significant savings on a clean-running electric or reel (push) lawnmower, redeemable at Orchard Supply Hardware June 5-8. With the discount, retail prices for the four models of mowers range from \$34.99 for a reel mower to \$141.99 for a corded, electric mower.

The district, OSH, Black & Decker and American Lawnmower Co. are co-sponsoring the discount program.

"We've gotten an excellent response to the offer," said Anthony Presto, the district's Public Education representative in Modesto, who is coordinating the lawnmower program. "We've still got a few coupons left on a first-come, first-served basis."

Spare the Air is the district's voluntary summertime program that addresses ozone pollution, or smog. The district issues a notification before any day's air quality is forecast to be unhealthy to encourage people to avoid contributing to air-quality problems.

There are typically more than 30 Spare the Air days each season, which runs from early June through September. The district forecasts a comparable number of Spare the Air days this year. "This program has been very successful in educating Valley residents about the sources of summertime smog. Now, we're counting on everyone to follow through with their actions to help improve air quality," Schneider said.

For more information on obtaining a lawnmower coupon, check out [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org) <<http://www.valleyair.org>> or call (209) 557-6400.

[Hanford Sentinel - May 28, 2004](#)

#### **County sued over human waste composting**

By James C. Loughrie  
Sentinel Reporter

HANFORD - Two groups opposed to the spreading of composted sewage on a Stratford-based farm filed a lawsuit against Kings County May 21. The lawsuits by nonprofit organizations, the Center on Race Poverty and the Environment in Delano and Valley Advocates in Fresno, were filed after the county approved a plan for Westlake Farms to compost human waste into fertilizer.

Paperwork filed in Kings County Superior Court by the plaintiffs claim that environmental documents did not go through the legal process as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act, the governing codes for construction in the state.

The plaintiff attorneys also contend that the Environmental Impact Report, a series of documents new buildings go through to analyze the impact of a project on the surrounding vicinity, used improper factors for the effect on air quality.

Ceil Howe Jr., who runs Westlake Farms with his family, said the lawsuit and the grounds it was filed under are unfortunate. "We just think it's unfortunate. We think the county and the board (of supervisors) did a lot of work preparing the reports," he said. The project applicants, Howe and the County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, a special sanitation district comprised of 78 unincorporated area cities in Los Angeles County, began working on plans for the composting plant in 2001.

At full speed, the proposed facility would process 900,000 tons of compost a year, with 500,000 tons of treated sewage coming from the sanitation districts and 400,000 tons of green waste as a mixing agent. Of the 40,000 acres Westlake Farms currently sits on, 14,500 will be sold to the sanitation district pending final approval of the compost plant. The plant location is within 1,000 acres located two miles from Interstate 5. An additional 1,500 acres that currently serves as evaporation ponds and wetlands will remain. The remaining 12,000 acres will be leased back to Westlake Farms and this acreage will use the finished compost as fertilizer.

The sewage that will come from Los Angeles County is classified as Class B Biosolids, treated sewage that was banned from land spreading in Kings County in 2001. The facility would process Class B Biosolids into Exceptional Quality (EQ-Compost), a classification that deems high-level pathogens have been processed out of the compost. The Kings County Sewage Sludge ordinance allows spreading Exceptional Quality Compost. Caroline Farrell, an attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, said her organization is mainly concerned with air impacts. One of the mitigating factors used for air quality in the report is disposing agriculture waste through composting rather than burning.

The lawsuit paperwork argues that disposing agriculture waste through burning will be phased out totally by 2010, and therefore should not be considered a benefit. Farrell said, "It's really a short-circuited analyses without looking at how this facility could mitigate air impacts." Howe pointed to a clause in Senate Bill 705 that if an alternative method is not available by the time phase-outs come, burning would still be allowed.

According to the Final Environmental Impact Report, SB 705 had not been adopted when the draft report was prepared in April 2002. According to that report, existing conditions at the time the notice of preparation was filed are legally allowed to be considered for the report. Valley Advocates attorney Richard Harriman said methods following the California Environmental Quality Act steps for a new project were violated. "There seemed to be a predilection to approve" the project by the county board of supervisors, Harriman said in an interview Wednesday.

Harriman said new data was introduced in the Final Environmental Impact Report that was not re-circulated for comment. The motivation for moving the project forward, he said, could have been increased property value for the farm, bringing more money to the county through property taxes.

"There's an incentive for the local board of supervisors to approve this project," Harriman said. Harriman said parties for the case are scheduled to meet for a private conference in July, with the first public court date not coming until September.

Howe said he will continue with steps to file additional permits with regulatory agencies, such as the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District and the California Integrated Waste Management Board, despite the lawsuit. County Supervisor Joe Neves, whose district includes a portion of Westlake Farms, said environmental impact reports are a way of creating the lawsuit. "That whole project has new modern science, proven science behind it. The special interest groups, with a single interest, continue to clog up the system," Neves said. "They're taking one industry (agriculture) that they don't want to support and making it less desirable."

[Merced Sun-Star editorial, May 29, 2004](#)

### **It's in your power to save energy**

With summer fast approaching, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger sent out a useful reminder to state workers this week about energy conservation. As they did during the energy crisis two years ago, the governor asked his "Fellow California State Workers" to reduce electricity in state buildings and to use the air conditioners at home and work selectively.

In view of high gas prices (not record high, as some have said, but high enough), the governor went a step further. He also urged state workers to flex their power at the pump -- "to conserve gasoline, save money, help the economy and the environment."

In his letter, the governor listed five specific things to do -- keep tires properly inflated, observe posted speed limits, accelerate and break smoothly, properly maintain vehicles and minimize idling times -- good advice. Unfortunately, he omitted some of the most effective and obvious strategies for saving gas: Leave the car in the garage and walk, bike or take public transit. We'd like to make a note of the latter.

The Bus, Merced County's public transportation system, is seriously underutilized. Just take a look at one of the buses as it passes by -- there are usually only a few souls aboard. State law says the bus system must recover 10 percent of its operating costs in rural areas and 20 percent in urban areas. With one month left in the fiscal year, The Bus is just skating by. If the system doesn't make its numbers, then it will be placed on probation.

The bus system currently gives 2,600 rides, including round trips, each weekday.

The Bus is doing what it needs to do to make sure it's effective. Plans are under way to change schedules to tailor its routes to employees who may otherwise drive themselves to their workplace. Of course, not everyone lives within walking or biking distance of work and transit isn't always convenient. But many more of us could take advantage of these options than do. Such strategies not only reduce gasoline consumption, they relieve congestion on the road, cut air pollution and save money.

The more the governor can remind Californians that there are sometimes alternatives to the car (particularly since he has a Hummer in the garage), the better.

[Merced Sun-Star editorial, May 28, 2004:](#)

### **Ag pollution rules crucial for clear air**

Last Updated: May 27, 2004, 11:30:23 AM PDT

The friendly representative from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District phoned recently and reminded us of an ugly fact of life in this region: Spare the Air days will soon be upon us again, and it's time for the newspaper to be prepared to let everyone know when they happen.

For those who are new to the Central Valley, the district's Spare the Air designation highlights times when air quality reaches levels that are so unhealthy, citizens are compelled to take special action to help clean the air.

Spare the Air is a wake-up call, for sure, that we happen to live in the second most polluted air basin in the country, and one of the dirtiest in the world. Anything that individuals can do to clean the air -- from carpooling to restricting fireplace burning -- is helpful.

While every little action counts, it's the big polluters that can make the largest difference in our air quality. To that end, we were happy to hear that the air district plans strict enforcement of regulations on farms throughout the Valley that contribute heavily to the microscopic particles of dust, chemicals and other substances that dirty the air we breathe.

Merced County is home to a number of these factory farms, which are defined as being larger than 100 acres or dairies home to more than 500 full-grown cows. The agricultural community previously had enjoyed an exemption from complying with federal air permit regulations. We were pleased when that exemption was stripped, effectively forcing ag operations to clean up their acts -- and, in turn, help clean up the filthy air we breathe.

We understand this isn't necessarily welcome news for farmers. The new regulations will require more work -- and more money -- for compliance in an industry where it is already tough to turn a profit. There are more than 100 options for farmers to cut down on particulate emissions, which range from grinding prunings (as opposed to burning them) to using organic methods of removal. All of them cost money and won't be easy to implement. Still, we think it's a small price to pay for clean air. The Valley already has one of the highest rates of childhood asthma in the country. And, according to a recent Associated Press article, research has shown that the particles in dirty air can shorten lives by one to three years if breathed regularly. Since we live here, we can count all of us in that group.

Farmers need to be supported in their quest to clean the air, and the air district needs to be vigilant to make sure farms are complying with the more stringent standards. We'll be sure to keep you posted on their progress.

[Hanford Sentinel commentary, May 27, 2004:](#)

**Wal-Mart: The good, the bad, and the truth**

The score was 3-2 the other night in what seems to be the most captivating city planning issue since coal generation; the winner: Super Wal-Mart. The self-named group N.O.W. (No on Wal-Mart) appears to be the loser along with, of course, every small business that must now compete with the most dominant retail giant of them all.

Admittedly the apocalypse is not upon us, but who in this town actively supports the megastore? Is it the soccer mom crowd or perhaps those seeking employment in the retail sector? Both of the preceding questions may uncover honest supporters of the store, however my focus currently is concerning three folks: Marcie Buford, Joaquin Gonzales and Dolores Gallegos.

As far as I know, these three encompass the only three Hanford residents who have affirmatively voted "Yes" on an issue that intimately affects our entire community. Undoubtedly, many local consumers will benefit from extremely low prices on retail goods and some services. The question that remains is: Who pays the price when Shaq shows up to play high school basketball?

David Ayers, who entered a "No" vote on the development, said this: "My main point of concern was I had difficulty with us granting the applicant an overriding consideration in terms of air quality mitigation."

I must say David, if air quality was of paramount concern then you would certainly not be living in the San Joaquin Valley. I also support cleaner air, but the Wal-Mart issue is not an issue of air quality. It is an issue about tax revenue vs. local small business.

Three members of the community have chosen tax revenue; revenues that will bring on more city employees and growing city budgets; or will it? Where do the profits from Wal-Mart end up? The answer: Nowhere near Kings County. Certainly Wal-Mart creates some high-paying corporate jobs but those jobs and paychecks know Hanford only as a dot on the map. Many of the wealthiest members of our community own and operate small business. They invest profits locally and pay property taxes on their homes as well as their business. What would happen if everyone who made more than \$75,000 a year packed up and left town? So think of it this way, we will become worker bees for the mega store, providing relatively cheap labor and lots of price savvy consumers and if we are "lucky," a possible increase in sales tax revenues.

I suppose any local Wal-Mart stockholders might reap a modest increase in the quarterly dividend or see a higher stock valuation from the development of new stores. I have to wonder if anyone on the City Council happens to own Wal-Mart stock or a fund of some sort that just might include Wal-Mart.

Some folks in this town have complained about how difficult it can be to get permits to do remodeling of their home or even to complete special work for their landscaping. It seems as if we have lots of local regulation from watering days to the toughest radar guns in the West. On this issue, the issue of Wal-Mart, who in our city government is using the power of regulation to protect small local business? We are a community built squarely upon small business and if ever city regulators wanted to puff up their chests and help the community, then - well ... I for one think that they failed.

Something struck me today as I finished lunch at a local restaurant and noticed some posters of local high school athletic teams. The supporters and advertisers on the Lady Pup poster included names such as: Netto Ag, Billingsley Tire, Champi Fencing and Keller's Chevrolet. Have you ever witnessed a 12 and under soccer team called the Wal-Mart Marauders? To this day we are a community of families; a place where your name is your reputation and the town is your home. Who will we be 25 years from now?

(Dr. Adamay Brown is a graduate and member of the Boalt Law School (Berkeley) Selection Committee. She is currently retired in Armona with husband Dr. Shinzi Brown. She can be reached by e-mail at: [adamaybrown@hotmail.com](mailto:adamaybrown@hotmail.com))

[Friday, May 28, Modesto Bee](#)

### **Dust up over almond facility**

By KEN CARLSON - BEE STAFF WRITER

The Salida Hulling Association is looking to move its almond shelling facility away from the urban encroachment and traffic congestion in east Salida.

"We used to be in an almond orchard; now we are in an industrial tract," said Tony Plaza, manager of the 34-year-old facility on Nutcracker Lane off Kiernan Avenue.

But residents near the association's proposed facility at Dakota Avenue and Highway 132, west of Modesto, don't want to live next to an almond huller.

Robert and Penny Liddle are afraid the dust, noise and traffic generated wouldn't be healthy for their three children.

The family lives in one of seven homes sitting across Dakota Avenue from the huller and said their 8-year-old daughter, Emily, suffers from asthma.

"I don't want to exclude my daughter from outdoor activities four months out of the year," said Robert Liddle.

"I want it stopped," he said of the proposal. Salida Hulling, a grower-owned cooperative, is seeking a county permit to build a hulling facility on a 50- acre parcel and operate it 24 hours a day, six days a week, from August to December.

The operation would shell almonds for more than 100 members in Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced counties. The association also would stockpile almonds and shells on the property at the northeast corner of the intersection.

Liddle's neighbors, Robert and Monica Ramos, appealed a Stanislaus County Planning Commission decision to approve the permit for the hulling operation last year.

The Ramoses said the commission did not have enough information about traffic and other issues, and the Board of Supervisors on Nov. 4 called for more study of the traffic. The matter is set to return to the Planning Commission in June.

Residents are circulating petitions in west Modesto neighborhoods along Kansas and Woodland avenues. Those streets could serve as routes for trucks going to and from the facility.

Proximity to school a concern

State transportation officials want to minimize truck traffic on Highway 132, so a permit condition would require trucks leaving the facility to go north on Dakota Avenue.

Officials at the 675-student Hart-Ransom School, at Dakota and Shoemake avenues, expressed concern about trucks going through the intersection when children are arriving and leaving.

One neighbor said that children wait for the school bus alongside much of Dakota Avenue and would risk being hit by a truck.

"Any of these streets could all be impacted," said Ream Lochry, superintendent of Hart-Ransom Union School District. "I don't want to see accidents happening because the drivers don't pay attention to school signs."

Salida Hulling representatives said the traffic and dust concerns are being exaggerated. The association expects 44 inbound trucks and 44 outbound trucks per day.

Plaza said the association has members with orchards in the area and currently uses some of the roads to ship harvested almonds to the existing plant.

Environmental safeguards

The sheller will have a filtering system to catch 99 percent of the dust, and mufflers will be installed to dampen the noise.

Trees will be planted to screen the facility on the north and the west. And the stockpiles will be managed to minimize dust.

"I think our guys looked at alternative sites and felt the advantage of having a large parcel is you could buffer the facility," said Thomas Terpstra, an attorney representing Salida Hulling.

[Lodi News Sentinel - Saturday, May 29, 2004](#)

### **Valley dairy owners suing over permit applications**

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"The tactic that the air pollution control district has taken does not appear to be consistent with the law," said Michael Marsh, chief executive officer of Western United Dairymen, one of the plaintiffs.

[Modesto Bee - Tuesday, June 1, 2004](#)

### **Dust-up over air rules continues**

By MARK GROSSI-THE FRESNO BEE

When a new air quality rule starts forcing San Joaquin Valley growers to hold down dust plumes in July, nobody will check farmland pollution monitors for improvement.

There are no farmland monitors. Instead, air monitors in cities -- miles from most farms -- will tell authorities if the 8,000 growers involved in the cleanup are successful.

It is one example of the way things work in the world of air science and government regulation, where estimates and indirect information can dominate conclusions.

As valley growers reduce their tilling, water unpaved roads and cut back on crop burning, questions are bound to surface about how air

officials will measure results. Growers want to make sure investments in pollution control are not wasted.

"We are interested in seeing the most accurate numbers possible," said Debbie Jacobsen, president of the Fresno County Farm Bureau. "I think everyone wants that, and I'm sure every effort is being made."

But with basically city monitoring for the 25,000-square-mile valley basin, there is no way to directly measure pollution from fields. Officials explain that they monitor urban centers -- Modesto, Fresno, Bakersfield -- because that's where people live and breathe.

Air experts know autumn is the biggest season for dust-borne particle pollution from farms. At that time, city monitors show increases in dust specks, which are less than one-seventh of the width of a human hair.

So San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials are confident they will have evidence of farm reductions, even though science still has difficulty distinguishing between dust specks from a city field or a farm field.

Farming is the major contributor of this pollution in the fall, officials said.

"We'll be able to tell if it's working," said Dave Mitchell, planning manager for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "We will see levels go down if it is working."

Number of specks estimated The district quotes a number for the expected reduction of potentially dangerous particles, or particulate matter, from farm dust -- 34 tons a day.

But a more basic question: Without farm monitors, does anyone really know how much air pollution is coming from agriculture each day? The answer is not simple.

Academic and government researchers study the amount of dust-borne specks created during land preparation and harvest. Cotton harvesting makes 3.4 pounds of particle pollution per acre, while almond harvesting creates almost 41 pounds per acre.

Using the estimates, state and local air officials figure pollution totals for various harvest and land preparation seasons, multiplying acreage by the number of pounds per acre for each crop. They determined farms produce about half of the particulate matter in the valley, totaling more than 160 tons per day.

As with any other calculation in a political arena, people argue about it.

A researcher with the U.S. Department of Agriculture challenges the numbers. Michael Buser of the Agriculture Research Service in Texas said he believes the estimates are overstated because of sampling equipment limitations in the past. It is time for an update, he said.

"Not only are ag operators being forced to put on more controls, they're being held accountable for pollution that's coming from another source," he said. "We're hoping to lower the emission factors, but it takes time."

State officials, who have heard Buser's pitch, said they don't have enough evidence yet to make changes.

Academics see other complications. The formulas need to incorporate soil moisture and texture, they said. Dry and silty soils kick up more pollution, so the experts need to incorporate those aspects into estimates. Researchers also wrestle with the idea of exactly where to measure the dust. Should they measure at the edge of the field or right behind the land leveler or the harvester?

Some believe the edge of the field is better since many dust specks fall to the ground before even leaving the field. Soil scientist Randy Southard, a professor at the University of California at Davis, disagrees.

"I prefer to focus on the implement because that's where the particulate problem is happening," said Southard. "The analogy I use is measuring at the smokestack for a factory versus going to the Canadian border and measuring it. I think you want to measure it at the smokestack.

"The point is, we want to discover tools we can give to growers to improve air quality. It's a good, meaty research issue, and more work is needed."

[Modesto Bee - Monday, May 31, 2004](#)

### **Natural gas fueling Riverbank-Oakdale shuttles**

By INGA MILLER - BEE STAFF WRITER

RIVERBANK -- At 6 a.m. Tuesday, two trolley-like buses powered by compressed natural gas are scheduled to begin transporting passengers on fixed routes between Riverbank and Oakdale.

Officials say that will make the Riverbank-Oakdale Transit Authority the first in Northern California to run its entire fleet on the cleaner fuel.

Four of the district's six vehicles in operation are shuttles that have run on compressed natural gas for the past two years. Those will continue dial-a-ride service for seniors, the disabled and people living more than a quarter-mile off the fixed route.

"I'm so excited," said Riverbank Administrative Services Director Linda Abid-Cummings, who wrote the grant to get the alternative fuel vehicles.

"There are other transit agencies out there (that run totally on compressed natural gas)," she said. "There is one in Southern California -- SunLine Transit (in Riverside County). Lodi has alternative-fuel vehicles, but they do not have 100 percent of their fleet alternative."

When the two trolleys start their hourly runs Tuesday -- one in Riverbank heading east to Oakdale and another in Oakdale heading west toward Riverbank -- they will burn 85 percent compressed natural gas and 15 percent diesel fuel. Natural gas saves wear on vehicles, gas money and fresh air, officials said.

Riverbank Councilwoman Sandra Benitez, a founding member of the ROTA board, said that means "we are doing our part to keep the air clean."

"Of course it is small because it is two small cities. But it is very innovative that we got together to have this system," she said. "It is very unusual that two cities work together to create a transit authority and then even more unusual that they decide and agree to go to compressed natural gas.

"Riverbank happened to have the room for the station in the corporation yard, and we will be building a new mechanics' garage for all of these vehicles."

That also will accommodate the city of Riverbank's fleet. The city has 12 vehicles running on compressed natural gas.

The transit authority is taking its cue from larger agencies, like the Sacramento Regional Transit District that has 254 buses operating on alternative fuel, Yolo County with 37 full-sized alternative fuel buses and Lodi with its 20 in the Yolo County Transportation District and the 20 alternative fuel buses.

But Terry Bassett, executive director of Yolo County's district, said the small agency should be "commended for taking the lead in going alternative fuel."

A ride on the trolley costs 75 cents for people four to 64 years old, and 50 cents for older passengers. Fare books and route maps are available at Oakdale City Hall, 280 N. Third Ave., and at Riverbank City Hall, 6707 Third St. Information also is available online, at <http://rotabus.freeservers.com>.

[Modesto Bee - Sunday, May 30, 2004](#)

### **New air rules hit dairy opposition**

By JENNIFER M. FITZENBERGER - BEE CAPITOL BUREAU

SACRAMENTO -- A clean-air law calling for dairy owners to obtain permits has sparked a legal battle over when the new rules will begin. Dairy leaders on Thursday sued the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District seeking to stop the district from requiring owners of large dairies to apply for permits by July 1.

Dairy officials say the district is misinterpreting Senate Bill 700, by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, which repealed agriculture's historic exemption from air-operating permits.

SB 700 was the cornerstone of Florez's five-bill, clean-air package that became law this year after months of ferocious debate between agriculture and environmental interests.

Dairy advocates argue that under the new law, dairy owners should not have to obtain permits until after emission studies are complete and the California Air Resources Board and local air district review the data and develop regulations. The deadline, industry leaders contend, is July 1, 2006. "We're asking the court to protect the integrity of SB 700," said Michael Marsh, chief executive officer of Western United Dairymen, one of the plaintiffs. "The tactic that the air pollution control district has taken does not appear to be consistent with the law."

District officials say the law forces them to require permits this year for farms and dairies that emit more than 12.5 tons of pollution-forming chemicals per year. That translates to about 1,000 San Joaquin Valley dairies with more than 1,954 cows each and as many as 4,000 farms larger than 300 acres that use internal-combustion engines.

California is the nation's top milk-producing state, with a dairy industry exceeding \$4 billion per year. Of the valley's eight counties, three are among the top five in the United States for milk production.

"SB 700 is very clear, and the resulting state law is clear that dairies are considered to be agricultural operations," said Dave Warner, director of permit services for the local air district. "The dairy industry is choosing to fight it rather than accept it. Other agricultural operations in the San Joaquin Valley seem to have accepted the fact."

Environmental advocates sided with the district. They said stretching the permit deadline to July 1, 2006, would further dirty the valley's polluted air.

[Modesto Bee, News and Notes - Sunday, May 30, 2004](#)

### **Mower offer to end**

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reports "excellent response" to the offer of discount coupons for electric or reel-push lawn mowers. And more coupons are available. They will be good at Orchard Supply Hardware stores, but only from June 5 to 8, which is when the district's Spare the Air season starts. The district wants people to dump gas mowers in favor of electric or reel-push mowers. More information on the program is available by telephone from the air district's Modesto office, 557-6400, and online, [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).

[Tulare Advance Register - May 31, 2004](#)

## **Spare the air**

**Valley air district tries to get lawn-mower owners to make switch to electric mowers**

**By Laura Florez**  
Staff writer

Russ Victory says he has thought about it -- saying goodbye to his gas-powered lawn mower in the name of clean air.

But over the weekend, when asked if he would take up the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on an offer to give Valley residents up to an \$88 discount next weekend to go electric or buy a new push mower, the Visalian said no.

It wasn't long ago that Victory paid \$700 for his self-propelled Snapper gas-powered mower, so buying another mower the first weekend of June would be a waste of money, he said.

"Right at the moment, it's still new. I've only had it for a year and a half," he said. "But it's definitely something I'd think about."

The offer to participate in the district's lawn mower incentive program is something the district is trying to sell Valley residents to kick off its Spare the Air Days campaign.

Spare the Air is an air district program that runs June 8 through Sept. 30 and promotes ways the public can help reduce smog in the Valley.

The Valley has the worst ozone designation given by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for areas that do not meet clean-air standards. Only Los Angeles shares that designation.

One way Valley residents can help change, the district says, is by switching from gas-powered mowers to reel or electric lawn mowers. They work just as well as gas-burning mowers, but do not pollute the air.

One gasoline-burning lawn mower can pollute as much as 40- late model cars, it says.

There are two different electric mowers and two different reel mowers that residents can choose from. With an air district coupon, they range in price from \$34.99 to \$141.99.

But so far, response to the offer hasn't been overwhelming, Anthony Presto, a district spokesman said.

As of Wednesday, fewer than 500 people Valleywide had called the district for a coupon on an electric or reel mower. Twenty of those requests were from Visalia, and two were from Tulare, he said.

"There's still room for more," he said.

Some Tulare County residents say they won't participate because they don't think that electric mowers work as well as gas-powered mowers.

Jose Renteria of Visalia said he isn't taking the offer because electric mowers require an electrical cord.

Those participating in the district's lawn mower incentive program next weekend must purchase one of two preselected reel mowers, or two electric mowers that require electric cords.

"[The gas powered] machine is better," Renteria said. "If I use the electrical, I would be pulling the cord, and my back yard is really big. I'd have to use two extension cords."

Paul Valencia of Visalia, who used to have an electric weed eater, said toting the cord around isn't convenient.

Once when the cord got in the way, Valencia cut it mistakenly.

Presto says the cord has definitely gotten in the way of the district's lawn mower incentive program.

While there are cordless electric mowers, the district's program doesn't include them this year because the district has less money to work with than it had in the past, he said.

But, Danny Alemania of Visalia said there are plenty of reasons he would consider buying an electric mower. If his gas-powered lawn mower, like Victory's, wasn't relatively new, he might do just that.

"You don't have to oil it, and I just think there's less maintenance," he said.

Victory says when his gas mower does break down, he'll most likely buy an electric one.

"If it breaks down, I'll definitely go electric," said Victory, who has actually owned an electric mower before. "You don't have to stop and get gas; it's so much easier."

## **Information**

Valley residents can get a coupon for either an electric or a manual reel mower by calling the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District at 230-6000. The coupon is valid for the weekend of June 5-8 at Orchard Supply Hardware stores.



Email this story <<http://www.tulareadvanceregister.com/customerservice/emailstory.html?Spare%20the%20air>>

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Ron Holman/Advance-Register **Russ Victory of Visalia plans to replace his gas-powered Snapper mower with an electric lawn mower when it breaks.**