

## **City to debut air quality flags with ceremony**

From reports

Merced Sun-Star, Monday, April 14, 2008

The city of Merced will conduct a flag raising ceremony to unfurl the new Air Quality Flag program at 8:30 a.m. Tuesday.

The ceremony will be held at the flag pole in front of the Merced Civic Center, 678 W. 18th St. The program involves flying color-coded flags keyed to the day's air quality.

The program was created at the request of the Merced-Mariposa County Asthma Coalition, which is supplying the flags to the city. The flag colors are: green for good air quality, yellow for moderate air quality, orange for air that's unhealthy for sensitive groups and red for unhealthy air.

Each flag represents a specific level of air quality as determined by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Information on the daily air quality forecast can be found at:

<http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/forecast.htm>.

The flags will be flown at the following city facilities:

- Merced Civic Center, 678 W. 18th Street
- Public Works Department Corporation Yard, 1776 Grogan Ave.
- Fire Station 51 (Main station) 99 E. 16th St.
- Central Police Station, 611 W. 22nd St.

The flag program is currently in place at 20 school districts in Merced County, along with Mercy Medical Center Merced and the Golden Valley Health Center.

## **Mean greens**

### **Valley plants, trees may add to pollution by emitting tons of a key smog element.**

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee, Sunday, April 13, 2008 and in Merced Sun-Star, Monday, April 14, 2008

An astonishing fact is buried in dirty-air data: Valley trees and plants produce far more hydrocarbons than vehicles do.

In the summer, crops, trees, lawns and the rest of nature release 360 tons daily of the key smog component. That's a whopping four times more hydrocarbons than from cars and trucks.

Hydrocarbons combine with other gases in vehicle exhaust to form the San Joaquin Valley's ozone, considered one of the nation's worst air problems.

Between the Valley's millions of farmland acres and the Sierra Nevada's sprawling forests, this region has a lot of plants. How big a role does all this greenery play in the Valley's bad air?

Scientists need the answer to help meet smog cleanup targets over the next 20 years. But it is difficult to know how much of nature's hydrocarbons are involved in creating ozone. In part because plants play a role in cleaning up the air, nobody has found a way yet to calculate the possible net benefits that trees and other plants provide for the Valley.

For now, nobody is advising people to chop down their trees to save the air. But scientists do say people should plant trees such as the Modesto ash, oleander and Bradford pear, which don't emit a lot of hydrocarbons, and avoid the high-emitting trees -- the sycamore, eucalyptus, weeping willow and cottonwood, they say.

Indeed, there is some truth to President Ronald Reagan's often-criticized statement that "trees pollute." But trees and plants also remove ozone, trap global-warming carbon dioxide, filter microscopic debris and lower temperatures, which slows creation of ozone.

City temperatures would no doubt climb if many Valley trees were eliminated, says Greg McPherson, director of the U.S. Forest Service's Center for Urban Forest Research at the University of California at Davis.

And that would mean more ozone.

"I think you would actually have a bigger air-quality problem in Fresno without trees," said McPherson, an urban forest researcher for 25 years.

Added Sharon Kelly, project director of the nonprofit Tree Fresno: "Trees are one of our biggest solutions to dealing with air-quality problems."

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District continues to examine plant pollution contributions to the air, though officials say air agencies do not regulate such emissions.

The district needs to understand as much as possible about every source of pollution, officials said.

"Anything that does not help air quality needs to be investigated," said James Sweet, air quality analyst and project planner. "We need a clearer picture."

The district is pushing to achieve the federal health standard for ozone by 2017, though the official cleanup target is 2024. The Valley ranks alongside the Los Angeles area with the country's worst ozone problems.

The ozone fight will get tougher. Federal officials have announced plans for a stricter ozone standard, and the Valley may not achieve it until 2030.

Ozone forms as hydrocarbons and oxides of nitrogen cook together in sunny weather. With hot, often stagnant summers and a bowl shape, the Valley is an ideal place to form this corrosive gas.

The pollutant attacks the skin, eyes and lungs. It can trigger asthma as well as other problems, especially in children and the elderly. Fresno County has the highest childhood asthma rate in California.

Diesel trucks are the biggest source of oxides of nitrogen. Aside from nature, many tons of hydrocarbons come from dairies, gasoline, paint and other fumes.

By current estimates, about 40% of the region's hydrocarbons come from nature. They also are known as volatile organic compounds such as isoprene, terpenes, alkanes, alkenes, alcohols, esters and carbonyls.

But state and federal air officials say they have trouble figuring out how much of nature's hydrocarbons are involved in creating smog.

An example: Estimates show more than 30 tons of hydrocarbons are coming from farm fields. But are they the type of hydrocarbons that will remain in the air long enough to drift and form ozone in a city? Some will, others won't.

Valley farmers grow more than 200 crops and often change crops from season to season -- meaning different types and amounts of hydrocarbons are released. So the ozone levels could vary widely each season, depending on the crop.

Another complication: Hydrocarbons increase with plant damage, which happens during harvest. The same thing happens when you mow your lawn or trim your shrubbery.

Other factors include time of year, wind and rainfall, said John DaMassa, chief of modeling and meteorology at the California Air Resources Board in Sacramento.

Spread these issues over the 25,000-square-mile Valley, scientists say, and any estimate is suspect.

But the regional air district needs to understand such a major hydrocarbon source to devise strategies for meeting the stringent ozone standard in the future. The strategies wouldn't focus on

plants and crops. Instead, they probably would continue to attack the other main ozone gas -- oxides of nitrogen.

DaMassa said science has known about nature's hydrocarbons for decades, and research has helped to describe the problem.

"We have better tools to do the research now," he said, "but we still need to do a lot more work."

Added environmental scientist Ray Chavira of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in San Francisco: "There is no straight answer."

Scientists said hydrocarbons coming from the Sierra Nevada are not likely to harm air quality in the Valley. But further research is needed in the mountains as well, they said.

The air-cleaning benefits of crops and various plants are known. Research shows an acre of a typical orchard or a cotton field absorbs up to a half pound of ozone in July.

But there is no Valley-wide figure for the amount of ozone being removed by millions of farmland acres. For years, scientists have focused on describing how ozone stunts plant growth and limits harvests, not defining the amount of ozone being removed.

In cities, research on the advantages of trees is well-developed and expanding.

Forest Service researcher McPherson said that for every dollar a city invests in a properly maintained tree, the residents could get benefits equal to \$2 to \$5.

The benefits equate to energy savings, air quality improvement, enhanced property value and reduction in storm water runoff, he said.

Studies of trees in parking lots show that they lower temperatures and prevent gasoline in cars from evaporating. The evaporating gasoline would release more hydrocarbons.

"There is more research going on right now in Sacramento on the net effect of having trees in the city," he said.

"The idea is to see how things change when a city expands the tree canopy. If trees are a legitimate air pollution reduction measure, then there's justification for planting them."

## **Classic Cars Face New Smog Check Rules**

By Staff Writer

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday April 14, 2008

San Joaquin Valley - State Senator Dean Florez has introduced SB 1549, a bill that would repeal the exemption from smog checks of pre-1976 cars in the San Joaquin Valley air district.

The district, struggling to improve its air quality in recent years, has given the seldom driven classic collector cars a break until now – based on the assumption the small number of vehicles exempted make little difference in the overall smog problem in the Valley.

The proposed regulation heard by a Senate committee for the first time this month has rattled the classic car collector clubs statewide which are mounting a letter-writing campaign to defeat the bill.

Visalia is a big car collector town and the rule change is unpopular in the place that spawned the motorsports festival a few years back.

Visalia car collector and former festival organizer Eric Coyne calls Florez' bill misguided. "I'm all for clean air but this targets a very small percentage of air emission problems from the guys who pride themselves on keeping their '66 Mustangs fine-tuned. There would be minimal air pollution gain. It seems more like a revenue play or window dressing," remarks Coyne.

The Senate Transportation and Housing Committee has set a hearing for April 15.

The bill would require any new owner of a pre-1976 car to get it smog-tested every two years. It would go into effect January 2009.

Collectors complain the problem isn't the cost of the smog test but the fact the older cars would probably not pass and be taken off the road. Prior to 1963, cars had no smog equipment.

Florez has said cars driven fewer than 15,000 miles a year are already exempt and that he isn't going after the classic collector cars.

Coyne says Florez ought to support Assemblywoman Nicole Parra's bill that would have far greater impact on Valley air. That bill – AB 2063 – would mandate all cars in the state undergo a biannual smog check like we in Tulare County have been doing for several decades.

Because of the opposition, Coyne says he understands Florez may modify his bill, remembering the statewide reaction in 1998 when hundreds of classic cars descended on Sacramento to fight successfully for the current exemption.

“Car clubs from all over the state are upset knowing that if they pass a rule for the Valley, it is just a matter of time before they too will be hit.”

“Take a look at lawnmowers,” Coyne notes. “That's a far bigger problem than a handful of classic cars.”

## **Air Board Proposing More Restrictions on Fireplace Burning**

By Rick Elkins

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, April 14, 2008

San Joaquin Valley - Keeping warm by the fireplace may become less of an option as the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is proposing more restrictions on the cold-weather practice.

On April 30, the board will consider plans to lower the pollution threshold when “fireplace no burn” days will become mandatory, said Scott Nester, director of planning with the pollution board.

The proposal is part of the “district's PM2.5 plan to clean up the fire people breathe in the San Joaquin Valley,” he said.

PM2.5 is particulate matter that is 2.5 microns or less in diameters. It is so small it can not only enter the lungs, but the blood stream, causing serious health problems.

It has been linked to aggravated asthma, irritation of the airways, coughing, difficult breathing and decreased lung function in children. The matter is so small that 24 particulates could fit on a single piece of human hair.

Jenny Bard, assistant director of advocacy with the American Lung Association of California, says the association strongly supports controls on wood smoke pollution.

“There is very strong scientific evidence that links wood smoke to lung disease, heart disease and early death,” said Bard. “People are suffering health effects from it. People become prisoners to their neighbors and wood smoke pollution,” she added.

Besides obvious breathing impacts, the matter can lead to heart attacks and plaque buildup in the blood.

She said vulnerable people are most susceptible on a daily basis, “But mostly it is a cumulative effect, especially on children. It is important to reduce exposure to children, to really protect their lungs,” she stressed. “When the air is unhealthy to breathe, we should not be adding any additional pollution to the air,” she added.

Nester said the new regulations would be phased in over the next three years. The plan will bring the Valley into attainment of the PM2.5 standard. Besides the increased wood burning restrictions, the plan includes more limits on emissions from industrial sources, controlling dust and limitations on prescribed burning and ag burning.

Nester admitted that the fireplace restriction is the biggest proposal on the table. “It has been a pretty big rule for us,” he said.

Last year, the district issued only four mandatory no burn days in Tulare County, the same for Kings County. While Nester said it is not certain how many more days will be added under the stricture rule, it could be two or three times as many. The district issued 28 voluntary curtailment days in Tulare County last year, 15 in Kings County.

The rule applies to all types of wood-burning devices, including those that use pellets, unless the fireplace is the only source of heat for a resident or the residence is above 3,000 foot elevation.

The air board uses a combination of weather conditions and pollution levels to determine if wood burning should be prohibited. "The main thing is if the wind is blowing," he said, explaining that wind is a good thing in that it disperses the smoke and allows for wood burning. Stagnant air, which the Valley is known for, would make it more likely wood burning would be banned.

The wood burning season runs from Nov. 1 to the end of February. The fine for violating the mandatory no burn rule is \$50. Last year, the district issued 87 citations in the eight-county region, but only one in Tulare County and none in Kings County.

The plan will go to air board for implementation in the third quarter of 2009 and go into effect in 2010 or 2011.

"There are quite a few new control measures for boilers, steam generators and commercial charbroiling operations," said Nester. Charbroiling is commonly used in restaurants.

He said the plans also calls for feasibility studies on cotton gins and even Fourth of July fireworks. "We do find concentrations (of particulate matter) go up significantly on July 4. We want to look to see what can be done."

As for the future of fireplaces, Nester does not expect them to be banned altogether. "I do not see any outright ban on fireplaces in the San Joaquin Valley," he said, adding there are restrictions on the number of fireplaces that are allowed in "dense subdivisions."

Support for the proposals, so far, has been positive. Nester said. "Some folks want stronger restrictions. Some folks want an outright ban on fireplaces."

Bard said one point the lung association wants to make, "is there is no support for wood smoke pollution because it is so harmful." However, she added, there are choices. She strongly urges people to only use Environmental Protection Agency-certified stoves, those built after 1992. "There are stoves out there that are very, very clean. There's a magnitude of difference of pollution from these stoves."

She added she hopes the air board considers an incentive program to encourage people to switch to the certified stoves.

People can view the plan on the board's Web site, [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org). The April 30 meeting will be held at the district office, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave. in Fresno. It will begin at 9 a.m.

## **West Park wins state money over city's objections**

Written by John Saiz

Patterson Irrigator, Friday, April 11, 2008

A state agency backed the proposed industrial park at the Crows Landing Air Facility on Thursday and put its money where its mouth is.

The California Transportation Commission decided with a 9-0 vote that PCCP West Park LLC should receive close to \$22.5 million in state money to build an inland port on and around the former U.S. Navy airbase in Crows Landing.

The money is contingent on West Park reporting back to the commission in September. West Park's report will need to include air quality reviews, agreements with Union Pacific to use the company's rail lines and disclosure of private benefits.

"It's really a big day for the entire Central Valley," said West Park lead developer Gerry Kamilos. "Having that type of endorsement and having the funds helps tremendously."

The proposed 7.5-square-mile facility has drawn criticism from Patterson city officials and other local jurisdictions. Patterson City Attorney George Logan spoke Thursday before the commission in an attempt to deny West Park the funding.

Though West Park officials received most of what they requested, Logan remained optimistic.

"All is not lost," he said. "I was pleased (the commission) took a serious look at it. We'll come back in September."

Kamilos said West Park would respond to the commission's concerns as it continues to design the project.

"We're ready and willing to address all the issues," Kamilos said.

West Park opponents have taken issue primarily with the size of the project and the traffic it would create. West Park estimates the project would generate about 37,650 jobs at its full size in 30 years. It would generate about 141,167 daily vehicle trips to and from the facility, as well as 12 new train trips through Patterson each day.

Patterson City Council has said it supports industrial development of the 1,527-acre air base, most of which the county owns, but not adjacent land. It also opposes the additional train traffic.

WS-PACE.org, a local group formed to oppose West Park's plans, opted not to send representatives to the commission meeting. WS-PACE vice president Claude Delphia said the commission's decision was not a "key issue," because Kamilos had stated previously that he could start building even without the state money.

The next hurdle for West Park will be winning the approval of the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors on April 22. West Park is at the tail end of an exclusive negotiating period with the county. If most supervisors are satisfied with West Park's plans, the county will enter another exclusive negotiating period with project developers. They will then have to draft an environmental impact report.

## **210 Connect forum will explore Valley's future**

By Valerie Gibbons

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, April 11, 2008

The creators of the 210 church and community center in Visalia want the South Valley to envision its potential.

Having launched the nonprofit project with a weekend Guitar Hero contest and youth concert, the organizers next will host a series of monthly community forums. The first in the series, "Pathways to Our Future," will be 7 p.m. Monday.

The forum will present a number of scenarios - positive and negative - describing the Valley of the future. Scenarios will represent policy choices regarding [air quality](#), agricultural-land use, education, population and other issues.

Organizers hope the forum will start a dialogue.

"It's not to advance any particular political or economic agenda at all," said Rich Hansen, a 210 Connect board member and the senior pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, which bought and remodeled the 210 W. Center Ave. building. "The purpose is to start a conversation about how we can work together to create a better future."

The program, developed by the Great Valley Center, has been offered throughout the Valley in recent years.

The second half of the "Pathways to Our Future" forum is planned for May. Upcoming topics may include: tolerance; building relationships; protecting the family; media influence on youth; supporting single parents; community response to mental illness; and creating a safe and stimulating environment for young people.

Suggestions for future topics are welcome.

"We're hoping for a good turnout," Hansen said. "This is something that hasn't existed in the community before now."

### **Ellis evaluation**

**An environmental report reveals potential air-quality, traffic and noise problems, but few other ill effects, due to a 2,250-house development proposed by The Surland Cos.**

Tracy Press, Friday, April 11, 2008

Construction of 2,250 homes slated for about 300 acres of south Tracy land will unavoidably increase noise, traffic and air pollution and likely force Pacific Gas and Electric Co. to replace a pair of high-pressure natural gas pipelines.

But according to an environmental impact report released this week on The Surland Cos.' subdivision and proposed water park, many other effects of the development between Corral Hollow and Lammers roads near Linne Road are insignificant.

The public has 45 days to comment on the voluminous environmental impact report, and the city's engineering and development department will have to answer each point raised in those comments.

Tracy is negotiating a development agreement with Surland that will give company owner Les Serpa the right to build 2,250 homes on the site — plus the rights to build another 1,600 homes somewhere else in Tracy at some point in the future — in exchange for 20 acres of land and \$20 million with which to build an aquatics center.

Voters overwhelmingly rejected the subdivision in a special ballot measure in 1998, when it did not include a water park.

Environmental reports are written to analyze the effects of growth. The report estimates that once built, the 3,850 homes would add 30,840 metric tons a year of greenhouse-gas air pollution a year. A metric ton is about 2,250 pounds.

They would send perhaps 7,000 to 8,000 more cars over the Altamont Pass during commute hours and clog intersections near the site, the report says, but delays could be lessened by adding traffic lights.

### **Agency plans fireplace-ban workshops**

By Denis Cuff

Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, April 11, 2008

The Bay Area's air pollution agency will hold nine public workshops this month on its proposal to ban wood fires in fireplaces and stoves on bad-air nights.

Each county in the region will get a meeting, providing an informal setting for the public to learn about and comment on the rule.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District board is expected to vote this summer on the rule, which is aimed at protecting the public from unhealthy particles in smoke.

The proposal would ban wood fires in fireplaces, fire pits, pellet stoves on Spare the Air winter nights when unhealthy soot levels are expected.

After months of reviewing earlier public comments, air district administrators continue to recommend that the ban apply to all wood-burning heating devices.

Hearth industry representatives have argued for a more lenient, two-stage no-burn rule allowing fires in EPA-certified wood stoves and fireplace inserts on moderately dirty air nights. No one could burn on dirtier nights unless the wood-burner is the only source of home heat.

Air district representatives said a two-stage ban would be difficult to understand and enforce because some people could burn on moderately dirty nights, while others could not.

## Farm bill barrels toward deadline

By Michael Doyle, Sun-Star Washington Bureau  
In the Merced Sun-Star, Friday, April 11, 2008

WASHINGTON -- House and Senate negotiators on Thursday staged their first face-to-face bargaining session over a long-delayed farm bill, whose details are still being crafted in private.

Eight months after the House passed its farm bill version, and four months after the Senate acted, negotiators convened for 45 minutes to start the final, crucial phase of their work.

"I know many of you had doubts we would ever make it to this point," said Rep. Collin Peterson, the Minnesota Democrat who chairs the House Agriculture Committee.

With lawmakers now facing an April 18 deadline, the outlines of a final package are already apparent. The bill will devote a record amount to fruits and vegetables, though less than specialty crop producers originally sought. Commodities like cotton, rice and wheat will largely retain their current subsidies. Some payment limits will be tightened, though not nearly as much as reformers hoped.

"I think we are probably 80 percent of the way through the technical issues," said Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced.

The remaining 20 percent, though, encompasses the toughest questions, including how to pay for new spending and how to craft a new permanent disaster program favored by Midwestern lawmakers. Negotiators expect to meet again by next Tuesday to assess progress.

Cardoza is one of 49 House negotiators, named because he chairs the House horticulture and organic agriculture panel. The Senate named 11 negotiators. The sprawling 60-member conference committee is larger than most; the 2002 farm bill, for instance, was written by 48 negotiators.

"It's certainly gargantuan," Cardoza said of this year's combined team.

In theory, the conference committee is where the House's 1,154-page bill and accompanying report is reconciled with the Senate's 1,572-page bill and accompanying report.

In practice, the brief public meeting Thursday served essentially a symbolic purpose. A few senior lawmakers positioned themselves with introductory comments, and then adjourned so negotiations could occur at a more discreet, member-to-member and staff-to-staff level.

Some of the unresolved conflicts are very narrow and specific to certain regions. Others cover a big turf.

"There are significant differences and disagreements, to be sure," said Democratic Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa, the chairman of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee.

California lawmakers, for instance, are insisting the new farm bill should allow Agriculture Department environmental funds to be used to cut [air pollution](#) in areas like that state's Central Valley.

Negotiators are still ironing out the language, which could help farmers pay for new cleaner-running pumps or tractors.

Unhappy asparagus producers in California and Michigan represent another unresolved conflict. The Senate bill includes \$15 million for asparagus farmers hurt by international trade; the House bill does not include the targeted money.

All told, the farm bill has a five-year price tag of \$280 billion. More than half of this will pay for food stamps and other nutrition programs.

The package outline includes \$1.35 billion designated for fruit and vegetable programs, which include block grants to states and specialty crop research. Several hundred million dollars in additional funding would pay for expanding an existing fruits-and-vegetables snack program to all

50 states. Currently, the healthy snack program is limited to 14 states, including North Carolina, Washington, Pennsylvania and Texas.

House members, in hopes of avoiding politically unpalatable tax hikes, now propose to offset some \$5.5 billion of the farm bill's costs through improved tax compliance on business revenue from credit card sales.

## **EPA bid to exempt farms from waste emission reports draws critics**

By Garry Mitchell, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Sunday, April 13, 2008

MOBILE, Ala.—Poultry growers use fans and other methods to deal with ammonia, which is generated by chicken waste and in extreme concentrations can blind or kill the flock as well as cause health problems for those entering the chicken house.

"You have got to keep it out," said Jimmy Miller, who operates four poultry houses in Blount County.

The "nose test" works for most growers who can walk into a poultry house and with a sniff determine if the ammonia level is too high and immediately switch on a fan.

But is anyone outside the chicken house threatened when the noxious fumes escape into the air?

Farm groups, including the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and the poultry industry, don't think so. But environmentalists and others supporting air quality in farm communities say the fumes need to be monitored—and they are objecting to a proposal to end such monitoring.

A U.S. Environmental Protection Agency rule from the mid-1980s requires that animal-waste emissions such as ammonia and hydrogen sulfide be reported to the government when they reach a certain level. Miller said he was unaware of the rule, but it is now getting a lot more attention.

After it drew enforcement actions by the federal agency and the courts in the last few years, EPA proposed exempting farms from reporting hazardous emissions from poultry and livestock waste.

In a 2003 case over ammonia emissions, EPA settled with Ohio-based Buckeye Egg Farm, which pledged to invest \$1.4 million in research and air pollution controls, according to Justice Department records.

Responding to the EPA proposal, Earthjustice attorney Keri Powell of New York told the agency that the exemption, if granted, will make it harder for emergency responders who keep track of emissions to protect communities.

EPA's public comment period for the proposed change ended March 27 and the agency received hundreds of responses. It's unclear when EPA will rule on the proposed change, which was published in the Federal Register on Dec. 28, when Congress was on its winter recess.

In March, Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, sent a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson arguing that the proposed reporting exemption "appears ill-considered and contrary to the public interest." The letter was also signed by Reps. Hilda Solis, D-Calif., and Al Wynn, D-Md. As of Friday, the EPA chief had not responded to the letter, a Dingell spokesman said.

Nationwide, the total animal waste generated by animal feeding operations—500 million tons, according to USDA—is equivalent to 3.3 times the solid waste produced by the entire U.S. population. Potential health risks from exposure to animal waste emissions include respiratory illness, lung inflammation and increasing vulnerability to asthma.

A University of Iowa air quality study says the worst hazard is hydrogen sulfide poisoning. This life-threatening situation only occurs in workers in and around livestock operations that store manure in liquid form, where gases can be trapped in a confined space. Sudden exposure to high

levels of this gas has been blamed for 19 deaths over the years, said Dr. Kelley J. Donham of the Department of Occupational and Environmental Health at Iowa, who worked on that study.

Donham said he doesn't favor an exemption to the EPA rule. He said the current policy gives residents some "feeling of control in their neighborhoods" and can provide guidance in deciding where farms should be located.

"It's some mechanism to look out for their welfare," Donham said in a telephone interview.

Donham said he's worked for the last 25 years to develop regulations that "strike a balance between (farm) production and health."

The EPA controversy is over whether or not low levels of emissions are really that hazardous, he said.

Richard L. Lobb, spokesman for the National Chicken Council, described EPA's proposal as a "common-sense rule that carries out the initial intent of Congress, which certainly did not mean to put ordinary agriculture operations in the same category as spills from chemical plants."

The federal Superfund law and the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act both contain emission reporting requirements that can trigger a toll-free phone call to the National Response Center. EPA determines whether a response is appropriate.

But EPA says it has not initiated a response to any NRC notifications of ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, or any other hazardous substances released to the air where animal waste at farms is the source of that release.

The poultry industry petitioned EPA for the reporting exemption in 2005 in response to federal court rulings against it. EPA came back last year with a proposal that covers not just poultry, but all farms, including research farms.

While reporting emissions may not require hazardous materials crews to race out to a farm, the data is crucial for communities struggling with pollution from factory farms, or those with extreme concentrations of farm animals, according to Earthjustice, based in Oakland, Calif. Earthjustice officials say they represent some family farmers and environmental advocates in 27 states in protesting the EPA rule change.

A joint statement by the National Chicken Council, National Turkey Federation, and U.S. Poultry & Egg Association said EPA has "wisely proposed to grant to poultry farmers a narrowly tailored exemption from rules that would otherwise require them to report 'emissions' that are actually nothing more than the normal consequences of livestock and poultry operations."

Lobb said there may be some scientific way to measure emissions, but "no farm is set up that way."

Ammonia and hydrogen sulfide both have a reportable quantity of 100 pounds. The EPA rule requires any person in charge of an animal feeding facility to immediately notify the National Response Center when they have knowledge of a release equal to or greater than 100 pounds.

A report is also required for state emergency response agencies and local emergency planning committees. These reports to date have generally estimated emissions coming from barns and lagoons, EPA says.

According to EPA, an estimated 140 animal-feeding operations reported ammonia releases exceeding the 100 pound-per-day level in the 2006 fiscal year, and an estimated 130 operations in the 2007 fiscal year. Some facilities regularly exceeded the reporting levels.

The EPA is conducting a study to determine how much ammonia is actually produced by animals in typical settings.

"At this time, there is no good science on how much ammonia a house full of chickens actually produces. There is a good chance that it is actually below the reporting threshold that would apply under the industrial-type rules," Lobb said in an e-mail message.

On the Net:

Proposed exemption: <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-AIR/2007/December/Day-28/a25231.htm>

Earthjustice: <http://www.earthjustice.org>

University of Iowa study: <http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/ehsrc/cafastudy.htm>

## **EPA Advisers Slam New Smog Rule**

By H. Josef Hebert, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle. Friday, April 11, 2008

WASHINGTON, (AP) --An advisory panel of scientists told the Environmental Protection Agency that its new air quality standard for smog fails to protect public health as required by law and should be strengthened.

In a stern letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson, the advisors expressed frustration that their unanimous recommendation for a more stringent standard was ignored when Johnson set the new smog requirements last month.

Johnson on March 12 lowered the amount of ozone that should be allowed in the air for it to be considered healthy from 80 parts per billion to 75 parts per billion. That meant 345 additional counties nationwide are in violation of the federal air quality standards for ozone, commonly known as smog, and must find ways to reduce the pollution.

While business lobbyists wanted the smog requirement unchanged, most health experts had argued that even stronger measures were needed.

The Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, created by Congress to advise the EPA, had urged the EPA to set a standard for ozone of between 60 parts per billion and 70 parts per billion.

In a letter sent to Johnson earlier this week, the committee said it remained convinced that the EPA's concentration level "fails to ... ensure an adequate margin of safety" for the elderly, children and people with respiratory illnesses.

The April 7 letter, which was obtained by The Associated Press, also criticized the EPA for not further strengthening a separate smog standard aimed at protecting forests, agricultural lands and the ecosystem, saying such action was "scientifically well justified."

The committee's criticism was viewed by some as expected since the panel's recommendations had been so clearly ignored.

The letter said the 25 scientists — seven committee members plus 18 members of the special ozone review panel — unanimously agreed they should "not endorse the new primary ozone standard as being sufficiently protective of public health."

"We sincerely hope that in light of these scientific judgments and the supporting scientific evidence, you or your successor will select a more health-protective ... standard during the upcoming review cycle," the committee wrote.

The EPA by law is required to review the health standard for ozone and a number of other air pollutants every five years.

## **Sizing Up the Utilities, if Carbon Caps Take Hold**

By Abby Schultz

N.Y. Times, Monday, April 13, 2008

Fuel prices and dividends are usually big drivers of the share prices of utilities. Now there is a new variable to consider: how much carbon their power plants emit.

Federal regulations over the next few years could limit the carbon emissions of these companies, and Wall Street analysts have begun compiling lists of potential winners and losers, based on that possibility.

All of the leading presidential candidates say they favor such measures, and some kind of legislation affecting utilities is likely at some point after the November election, Citi Investment Research said in a January report.

If “carbon caps” — limits on carbon emissions — eventually become law, the winners may include operators of nuclear power plants (which don’t emit carbon), while the losers may include power companies that mainly burn coal, analysts say. Beyond that, who wins and who loses will depend on the details of possible future regulations, which can’t be predicted with certainty.

Still, a cottage industry on Wall Street has begun to evaluate these questions.

“I think the time when you can keep your head in the ground is just over,” said Hugh Wynne, a senior analyst at Sanford C. Bernstein & Company.

Some analysts have begun to evaluate the potential impact of carbon caps on stock prices.

“Carbon has been an ongoing issue for the investment community for the last three or four years,” said Brian Chin, an equity analyst at Citi Investment Research.

Federal carbon rules might be similar to regional efforts in the Northeast and California. These plans are to place emission limits on plants that emit carbon dioxide, and, in the case of California, on other greenhouse gases as well. Allowances or credits to emit a certain level of greenhouse gases are either auctioned or granted free.

Under such a system, called “cap and trade,” utilities that stay below emissions quotas can hold credits for the future or sell them on the open market. In Europe, the cost of one credit has averaged \$25 a metric ton of carbon dioxide since January 2005, when the European Union’s emissions trading plan began.

Companies like the Exelon Corp., the Constellation Energy Group and the Entergy Corp., which operate nuclear power plants, would benefit from cap-and-trade plans under consideration, like the Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act, which is pending in Congress, Mr. Chin said.

“They all potentially get a very large benefit from higher power prices being pushed up by carbon,” he said.

If emission credits are auctioned in a cap-and-trade system, there may be particular problems for coal-fired generators of electricity in markets where natural gas is a major fuel. Burning natural gas generally emits 40 percent less carbon dioxide than coal, and coal-fired plants in gas markets might have a hard time passing along the costs of carbon credits to consumers, some analysts say. NRG Energy, Reliant Energy and Dynegy could feel the sting, Mr. Wynne of Sanford C. Bernstein said.

While regulated utilities would seek permission to pass on their added costs to ratepayers, state public utility commissions might balk, having already raised the average retail price of electricity nearly 30 percent in the last five years, Mr. Wynne said. Even if states allowed utilities to recover the cost of carbon credits, he said, they might reduce the permitted return on equity. The potential expense of complying with carbon emission limits, in addition to rising construction costs, led several commissions to cancel plans for coal-fired power plants last year, he said.

Eric Kane, a senior analyst at Innovest Strategic Value Advisors, a research firm that analyzes the effects of environmental, social and governance issues on stocks, also warned that many companies would have to shoulder an increased burden.

“It’s unlikely these companies will be able to pass all the costs down to consumers,” he said. In the end, he said, there will be an effect on shareholders.

Innovest rates companies on management of carbon emissions. It gives its highest rating to three utilities — including the FPL Group, which, it says, has a strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and make huge investments in wind power; and PG&E for developing energy efficiency initiatives and renewable power. The third company in the group, Consolidated Edison got the highest rating for taking measures to reduce emissions. Innovest’s lowest rating goes to

four companies that it says have done relatively little in this area, Allegheny Energy, the Southern Company, the Ameren Corp. and the Scana Corp.

Ceres, a coalition of investors and environmentalists based in Boston, has argued that electric utilities around the world should provide more financial data on the potential costs of managing carbon emissions.

The issue is becoming "more and more material for investors," said Dan Bakal, director of electric power programs at Ceres. He said national regulations on carbon emissions "are getting closer and closer to reality."

## **Yale hopes climate change conference is groundbreaking**

By John Christoffersen

Modesto Bee, Sunday, April 13, 2008

NEW HAVEN, Conn. — Organizers hope a gathering of governors this week will be as effective in addressing climate change as a similar event that launched the conservation movement a century ago.

As many as 10 governors and leading experts on global warming plan to attend the conference Thursday and Friday at Yale University. Participants will review state programs to combat global climate change and develop a strategy for future action.

"I think we have high hope this will mark a significant turning point in a commitment to action on climate change," said Dan Esty, a Yale environmental law professor and director of the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy.

The conference is part of a series of initiatives designed to pressure officials to take action, Esty said. He cited former Vice President Al Gore's new three-year, multimillion-dollar advocacy campaign calling for the U.S. to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, along with proposed federal laws, a partnership between business and environmental groups calling for curbs on emissions, and measures or commitments by 28 states and 600 mayors to address the issue.

Esty also noted that all three presidential candidates favor stronger action to deal with climate change.

The gathering will also celebrate the centennial of President Theodore Roosevelt's landmark 1908 Conference of Governors. That conference launched the modern conservation movement and planted the seed for the National Parks System and significant state efforts to protect land.

"Roosevelt showed remarkable foresight a century ago in engaging the states' chief executive officers to preserve and protect the nation's natural resources," Yale President Richard C. Levin said in a recent statement. "Now, we face a new and critical challenge - global climate change - and leadership in the United States is coming from visionary state governors."

Governors who plan to attend the conference include M. Jodi Rell of Connecticut, Arnold Schwarzenegger of California, Jon Corzine of New Jersey, Christine Gregoire of Washington, and Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas. Quebec Premier Jean Charest also will attend.

Dr. R. K. Pachauri, chairman of the Nobel Prize-winning United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, will address the gathering.

Last year, a Nobel Prize-winning U.N. network of climate experts and other scientists warned of rising seas, droughts, severe weather and other dire consequences without sharp cutbacks in emissions of the industrial, transportation and agricultural gases blamed for warming.

For its part, Yale has tried to lead the way with an initiative to cut its greenhouse gas emissions to 10 percent below the university's 1990 level by 2020. Yale says its greenhouse gas reduction target is comparable to the reduction needed globally to keep temperatures from rising above a level that the scientific consensus forecasts would produce greatly intensified damaging impacts from warming.

Among the state initiatives, a tailpipe emissions law in California would force automakers to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent in new cars and light trucks by 2016.

But the Environmental Protection Agency recently blocked California from cracking down on auto emissions by saying global warming isn't unique to the state and a new federal fuel efficiency law was a better approach.

At least 16 other states were also blocked from enacting the greenhouse gas emissions reductions sought by California. Esty predicted that decision would be overturned on appeal.

## **Scientists Say EPA's New Smog Standard Fails to Protect Public**

Health Highlights: April 12, 2008, Editors of Health Day

Washington Post, Saturday, April 12, 2008

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's new air quality standard for smog doesn't protect public health as required by law and needs to be strengthened, an advisory panel of scientists wrote in a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson.

In the letter, sent earlier this week, the 25 scientists expressed frustration that their unanimous recommendation for a stricter standard was ignored, the Associated Press reported.

The Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, created by Congress to advise the EPA, recommended the ozone (smog) limit be lowered from 80 parts per billion to between 60 parts per billion and 70 parts per billion. The EPA's new standard is 75 parts per billion.

In the letter, the scientists also criticized the EPA for not further strengthening a separate smog standard meant to protect forests, agricultural land and the ecosystem, the AP reported.

## **Beijing to close factories for Olympics**

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Monday, April 14, 2008

BEIJING—The Beijing city government has announced a sweeping plan to stop construction and close heavy industry to improve air quality ahead of the Olympics.

The city's environmental protection body said Monday that the plans include stopping all digging and concrete pouring on construction sites from mid-July 20. Nineteen heavy-polluting industries have been told to cut their emissions by 30 percent.

Pollution—in addition to the violence in Tibet and other human rights issues—has been a major concern for China in the lead up to the Olympics.

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Sunday, April 13, 2008:](#)

## **Prove Big West can be safe neighbor**

The Big West Refinery on Rosedale Highway *is where it is* in the wrong place, surrounded by businesses, homes and schools.

Its location is a product of decades of bad decisions by Kern County and Bakersfield city officials, who failed to "protect" the aging refinery from urban encroachment.

The homes, stores and schools that straddle Rosedale Highway *are where they are* too close to a refinery that presents health and safety risks in the event of a mishap. The refinery's expansion plans increase these risks.

The refinery and the surrounding community are on a collision course. Big West wants to expand its refinery to meet California's increasing energy demands. The region's struggling economy wants the jobs and revenue that the proposed \$700 million expansion will provide. But many in the community are rightly concerned about the very real dangers the expansion poses.

Their concerns focus on the company's proposed use of hydrofluoric acid, one of two liquid acids used as a catalyst in the production of alkylate, which boosts octane in fuel and is a premium blending stock for cleaner-burning gasoline and diesel.

Last year, the company proposed to use traditional HF in its expansion. This acid can form a ground-hugging cloud if spilled. The cloud can travel up to five miles, harming and killing those in its path.

After protests from the public and safety agencies, the company changed its plans to use modified HF, a less toxic chemical.

But the vast majority of refineries in California use sulfuric acid, instead of modified HF, citing its comparative safety. Big West counters that modified HF is as safe as sulfuric acid, is more cost effective and will require fewer trucks to travel to the refinery on already crowded Rosedale Highway. County officials note, however, that the truck traffic can be minimized if an on-site sulfuric acid generation plant is included in the expansion plans.

Big West's expansion plans were the subject of an environmental study, which has drawn so much public criticism that county planners are revising it. The public will have another 45-day period to comment after the revised analysis of the expansion's environmental consequences and safety risks are completed in about two months.

Opponents have come together as Bakersfield Citizens Against Hydrofluoric Acid to fight the refinery's proposed use of the controversial chemical. At a rally last week, Vicki Burger, a member of the group, expressed her concerns:

"Because I grew up here, I have a deep understanding of the importance of the oil and gas industry to Bakersfield and Kern County. I have, and do, support the industry. However I am very frightened by Big West's plans to use HF. It makes absolutely no sense and is wrong for our community."

Burger's concerns are echoed by state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, and Kern County firefighters, who are pressing the company to change its plans and use sulfuric acid. They note the danger posed to the community, refinery workers and emergency crews.

These concerns about the refinery's operation and proposed use of modified HF must not be dismissed as the rants of the "not in my backyard" crowd.

Kern County planners are taking concerns seriously, hiring an outside consultant to weigh the risks of modified HF and sulfuric acid, and setting strict requirements if the refinery expands. The burden is on Big West and county regulators to prove to the community that the refinery can be a safe neighbor.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sat., April 12, 2008:](#)

### **Make everyone pay**

A \$37 vehicle registration fee for Valley residents to pay for smog clean-up? Huh?

Sen. Dean Florez and Assembly Member Juan Arambula are crazy if they think Valley residents should pay and no one else.

Everyone nationwide should pay. Everybody who benefits from Valley ag production should pay. The out-of-Valley distributors, truckers, consumers, be they from Chicago, Dallas, Vermont or wherever -- everyone should pay. Fuel suppliers, grocery chains, store employees, unions, any consumers of produce. The doctors, barbers, teachers. See where this is going?

Don't penalize Valley residents for feeding a nation while we choke.

*Anthony Phillips, Malaga*

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, April 11, 2008:](#)

### **Follow Europe's lead**

Each time we find ourselves at the pump these days, I'm sure most of us moan about the gas prices. In most European cities, however, you'll find gas prices above \$8 a gallon. How do they do it? The best answer is actually quite simple: Because they have to!

Gas prices in Europe have shaped the way they live and think about getting around. The result is a very well-developed public transportation system, lifestyles that incorporate more physical activities and mentalities that limit consumption. The result is a healthier, less oil-dependent, population (and their economies are not suffering like ours, either).

We could use some of that "encouragement." I welcome the rising gas prices and hope that they will wake us all up to the reality we've avoided: Sales of large (often singly occupied) SUVs remain high, demand for alternative fuel vehicles remains lower than expected, and consumption of gas hardly wavers despite the well-documented relationship between our vehicles and the air quality.

This is especially true here in the Valley where drastic cuts in emissions would do very well for our poor air quality. We all know it, but who is really making the change?

*Scott Roberts, Clovis*

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses EPA offers more than \\$5 million towards new technology. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

### **Ofrece la EPA más de cinco millones de dólares para nueva tecnología**

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino  
Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, April 10, 2008

La Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental, la EPA, en inglés, convocó a un concurso de propuestas para invertir en el oeste del país más de cinco millones de dólares en desarrollo de nuevas tecnologías que ayuden a reducir el consumo de diesel.

Los fondos forman parte de una campaña para entregar casi 50 millones de dólares en todo el país, dijo la directora de la agencia en la región oeste, Deborah Jordan.

En el país hay unos once millones de máquinas que usan diesel.

La funcionaria explicó que al reducir el consumo de diesel, la EPA contribuye a evitar unas 20 mil muertes prematuras anuales y gastos por unos 150 mil millones de dólares en servicios de salud debido a la contaminación.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the Port of Long Beach will invest \\$19 million in measures to control diesel consumption.](#)

### **El puerto de Long Beach invertirá 19 millones para coordinarse con reglas del 2009**

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino  
Radio Bilingüe, Friday, April 11, 2008

El puerto marítimo de Long Beach, California, informó que invertirá unos 19 millones de dólares en medidas para controlar el consumo de diesel a partir de junio próximo.

El plan busca reducir emisiones contaminantes en el referido puerto y sus inmediaciones, gradualmente durante un año, para adecuarse a nuevas normas federales que entrarán en vigor en el 2009.

Long Beach y el puerto de Los Ángeles contribuyen a que esa región tenga el aire más deteriorado del país.

Autoridades de California consideran que ambos puertos ocasionarían hasta cuatro mil 500 muertes prematuras anuales, además de cuantiosos gastos médicos.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the promise of "Green" has risen the prices on food. Bio-fuel responsible for hunger.

## **Promesa verde subió precio de alimentos**

### **Biocombustibles, responsables de hambre**

Univision, Sunday, April 13, 2008

WASHINGTON - Los biocombustibles, que nacieron con la promesa de convertirse en alternativa "verde" al petróleo, se encuentran en los primeros puestos de la lista de culpables de la crisis global desatada por el alza de los precios de los alimentos

#### Fenómeno alarmante

Tanto el Fondo Monetario Internacional (FMI) como el Banco Mundial (BM), que celebran este fin de semana su reunión de primavera, han puesto de manifiesto durante los últimos días la conexión entre ambos fenómenos.

El debate sobre sus ventajas gana así un renovado protagonismo, aunque el creciente uso de productos de origen vegetal como el maíz en Estados Unidos, la mandioca en China, la caña de azúcar y la soja en Brasil, y el aceite de palma en Indonesia para la generación de combustibles y su posible impacto en los precios de la comida es desde hace tiempo objeto de estudio académico.

Corinne Alexander y Chris Hurt, de la Universidad de Purdue (Indiana), señalan en un extenso análisis de finales de 2007 que la demanda de maíz y soja aumentó rápidamente durante los primeros años de la era de los biocombustibles, cuya producción despegó con fuerza alrededor del 2000.

#### Aumentaron los precios

Eso hizo que subieran los precios de ambas cosechas y se tradujo en un incentivo para destinar más acres a esos cultivos, sobre todo el maíz, lo que redujo el espacio para otros productos, que también se encarecieron, al continuar la demanda y contraerse la oferta.

Los cambios en el precio del trigo se trasladaron a la harina, el pan y otros derivados. La subida de la soja se reflejó en los aceites para cocinar y la margarina.

El pollo, la carne de ganado y los lácteos también subieron, ya que los citados animales son grandes consumidores de maíz y soja.

#### Factores adicionales

Lo anterior se sumó a otros factores como las sequías recientes en países productores como Australia, la subida del petróleo y el consiguiente encarecimiento de fertilizantes y costes de transporte y los cambios en la dieta en países como China, cuyo consumo de carne per cápita ha aumentado un 150 por ciento desde 1980.

Esa combinación fatídica ha impulsado en un 48 por ciento los precios de los alimentos desde finales del 2006, según el FMI, y provocado revueltas -en algunos casos violentas- en países tan distantes como Egipto, Pakistán, Haití o Burkina Faso.

Como consecuencia, varias docenas de naciones han impuesto algún tipo de control sobre los precios y más de 30 afrontan riesgos de desestabilización, según el Banco Mundial, que calcula que la pobreza podría aumentar entre un 3 y un 4 por ciento en los próximos años a raíz de la actual crisis.

#### Hambruna en puertas

El rostro de esta tragedia es humano, como queda de manifiesto en la mirada perdida de los niños desnutridos que estos días han vuelto a aparecer en algunos medios de comunicación.

De ahí que hayan empezado a multiplicarse los llamados para frenar los biocombustibles, sobre todo los que se producen a base de maíz en los países ricos.

Brasil utiliza fundamentalmente caña de azúcar, que ofrece las mayores ventajas contra el cambio climático, según el Banco Mundial.

Los ricos no lloran

Distinto es, según el diario *The New York Times*, la situación en los países ricos, ya que el etanol a base de maíz ofrece, "en el mejor de los casos, solo una pequeña reducción de los gases invernadero frente a la gasolina y podría agravar" la situación si causa más deforestación por la extensión de ciertos cultivos.

Además, el Times recuerda, en un editorial publicado el jueves, que tanto Washington como la Unión Europea subvencionan la producción y desincentivan la importación con aranceles.

"El mundo rico está exacerbando los efectos (de la crisis) al respaldar la producción de biocombustibles", concluye el periódico.

Los pobres tienen hambre

El presidente del Banco Mundial y ex representante de Comercio Exterior estadounidense, Robert Zoellick, evitó pedir esta semana una eliminación de los subsidios, pero sí apuntó que los países deberían considerar "si esas prácticas tienen sentido".

En juego están los más de 800 millones de personas que viven con menos de un dólar diario en el mundo, muchos de los cuales podrían ser víctimas de nuevas hambrunas si no se buscan soluciones a la actual situación.

Francia quiere medidas

El alza de los precios alimentarios en el mundo y las protestas que esta situación ha provocado llevarán a Francia a pedir el próximo lunes a la Unión Europea una reacción rápida con más apoyo a la agricultura.

El ministro francés de Agricultura, Michel Barnier, indicó que aprovechará una reunión con sus homólogos de la UE en Luxemburgo para impulsar una "iniciativa europea para la seguridad alimentaria" en el mundo.

Según Barnier, existe una situación de "emergencia" por esta cuestión, que ha levantado protestas en distintas partes del mundo, desde África hasta América, en las cuales han muerto decenas de personas.

Problema de abastecimiento

En ese sentido, Barnier propone reinstalar la importancia de la producción agrícola con fines alimentarios, que se ha visto afectada por la explosión de los biocarburantes.

"Europa, con su agricultura avanzada y su política común, debe desempeñar plenamente su papel de abastecedor y regulador de los mercados alimentarios mundiales, tema que estará en el orden del día de la presidencia francesa de la UE", en la segunda mitad de 2008, afirman en un editorial publicado el viernes en un diario francés varios responsables gubernamentales.

"El encarecimiento de los alimentos constituye de forma paradójica una oportunidad para relanzar las inversiones en el área agrícola", agrega ese texto firmado por el canciller, Bernard Kouchner, y los secretarios de Estado para Asuntos Europeos, Jean-Pierre Jouyet, y de Derechos Humanos, Rama Yade.

Esta toma de posición del principal productor agrícola de la UE se produce además en momentos en que el bloque efectúa un "examen médico" de su Política Agrícola Común (PAC), con su alto presupuesto en juego.

Londres pide acuerdo global

Gran Bretaña ha manifestado estar de acuerdo con Francia en la necesidad de actuar ante el aumento de los precios alimentarios, aunque prefiere una iniciativa a nivel internacional, más allá del ámbito comunitario.

El primer ministro británico, Gordon Brown, acaba de escribir una carta a su homólogo japonés, Yasuo Fukuda, para colocar el alza de los precios de los alimentos en la agenda de la cumbre del G8 (Grupo de los siete países más industrializados y Rusia) en julio.

"Compartimos las preocupaciones crecientes sobre la seguridad alimentaria y pensamos que una respuesta coordinada de la comunidad internacional" es necesaria, subrayó un diplomático británico en Bruselas.

De todos modos, Gran Bretaña pretende una reducción del presupuesto de la PAC y no sacará forzosamente las mismas conclusiones que Francia sobre el tema.

La actual movilización contra el hambre "no debe consistir en resistir a la reforma de la PAC o en presionar a favor de una política más proteccionista", indicó en ese sentido un diplomático europeo.