

Biodiesel plant in planning stages

Vegetable-based fuel may soon come to Firebaugh

By Jeff St. John

Fresno Bee, Thursday, Aug. 21, 2008

Firebaugh may soon be able to offer trucks, tractors and city vehicles a vegetable-based source of fuel, if plans for a new biodiesel plant and fueling stations in the city limits come to fruition.

The plans come from Watsonville-based Energy Alternative Solutions Inc., which this week briefed the Firebaugh City Council on its plan to build a 2.5 million gallon-per-year biodiesel production plant within the city limits, one similar to a plant it operates in the Salinas Valley city of Gonzalez.

Waste vegetable oil from restaurants and other sources -- and possibly locally grown oil-rich crops in the future -- would provide the raw material, or feedstock, for the plant, which would cost about \$4.5 million to build and employ about 25 people, said Rich Gillis, president and chief executive.

And truckers, farmers and city employees looking for a cleaner-burning diesel fuel would be the customers for the 20% biodiesel and 80% standard diesel blend called B20 that Gillis plans to sell at two fueling stations he hopes to build within the city limits.

"We believe that a biodiesel plant would do well in that area," Gillis said. "It seems that folks are interested. This is very preliminary. We'll work with the city now to put together a more detailed plan."

Gillis didn't put a timeline on when the plant might be built. But Jose Ramirez, Firebaugh city manager, said he hopes to see it operating in six to eight months.

"Creating new jobs, having green technology here, making this community a green community and having biodiesel as an alternative fuel -- it all comes together," Ramirez said.

Energy Alternative Solutions has asked the city for about \$500,000 to \$1 million in financial assistance, which the city could provide in the form of a redevelopment loan, he said.

Ramirez said he sees value in providing that assistance, not only for the jobs and tax revenue the production and fueling station operations would provide, but also for the fuel it would be selling.

"Giving the different packinghouses and the city and school district access to this lower-emission fuel is right up our alley," he said.

Energy Alternative Solutions intends to get its main feedstock of used vegetable oil, known as "yellow grease," from restaurants, rendering companies and food processors, Gillis said. But he said he's also interested in the potential for growers in the area to grow jatropha, an inedible but oil-rich plant, as an alternative feedstock.

Obtaining feedstock locally and selling the biodiesel locally is part of what Gillis, a former associate dean of economic development at Gavilan College in Gilroy who helped start its biotechnology center, refers to as his company's "community-based closed-loop" business model.

"We don't want to be greedy," he said. "We want to make sure that, as much as possible, we make it a fair exchange for the community, which will be the end users, and us."

Appeals court tosses pesticide lawsuit

By PAUL ELIAS, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Tri-Valley Herald and Modesto Bee, Thursday, Aug. 21, 2008

San Francisco, CA (AP) --A federal appeals court on Wednesday overturned an order that farmers in the San Joaquin Valley and Ventura County reduce air pollution from pesticides by 20 percent.

A three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously reversed a lower court ruling that found the state had failed to adopt enforceable measures to control the pollution. The panel said the lower court lacked the authority to make that finding, and it said any legal challenge had to take the form of a petition to review the Environmental Protection Agency's rule-making process.

Because of the lower court ruling, the state Department of Pesticide Regulation ordered farmers to cut the amount of spray by 20 percent this year. Strawberry farmers in Ventura County, in particular, complained that the new restrictions would reduce the number of acres they would be able to harvest.

The department said it would "immediately move to provide some relief for Ventura growers." Its chief, Mary-Ann Warmerdam, said the state has its own plan to reduce smog caused by pesticides.

"This ruling allows DPR to adopt a more thoughtful, comprehensive approach to reducing pesticide emissions that contribute to smog," Warmerdam said. "We believe that environmental and economic progress can be achieved through cooperation, rather than continued litigation and conflict."

Brent Newell, a lawyer with the San Francisco-based Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment who represented environmental groups that filed the lawsuit, declined to comment because he hadn't reviewed the decision.

9th Circuit ruling is pesticide win for state Regulatory Plan Didn't Break U.S. Law, Court Says

By Denny Walsh

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, Aug. 21, 2008

In a boon to agribusiness and a blow to environmental activists, a federal appellate court on Wednesday threw out a Sacramento federal judge's ruling that California's pesticide regulation plan violates the Clean Air Act.

The judge's opinion was overturned, and a challenge by a coalition of community organizations to the state's regulatory scheme was ordered dismissed by a three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

U.S. District Judge Lawrence K. Karlton had found California violated the act by failing to comply with a 1994 plan approved by the federal Environmental Protection Agency that called for a crackdown on airborne pesticide emissions in five of the state's regions, including Sacramento.

In April 2006, Karlton ordered the state Department of Pesticide Regulation to "propose, adopt, and submit to EPA for approval and implement regulations no later than Jan. 1, 2008, to achieve the emission reduction goals" set forth in its plan.

The judge found the act was violated when regulators used improper data in calculating the baseline for emission reduction goals and thus did not adopt "enforceable control measures."

Under the terms of Karlton's mandate, new regulations were required to ensure Sacramento, San Joaquin Valley, Ventura, Southeast Desert and South Coast air basins reduced emissions of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, from pesticides by 20 percent from 1990 levels.

VOCs contribute to ground-level ozone - called smog - an air pollutant harmful to humans and plant and animal life.

The state appealed.

The appellate judges said Wednesday that the baseline formula is not "an emission standard or limitation," as those terms are defined in the act.

So, the judges said, Karlton was barred from acting under that section of the Clean Water Act on which the plaintiffs based their challenge.

"It necessarily follows that the district court also lacked jurisdiction to impose remedies based on the alleged deficiency in the baseline methodology," the panel said.

"While we acknowledge that the baseline is a critical foundation, this does not change our view that neither the baseline nor the methodology qualify as independently enforceable aspects of the" state's plan.

"Nor would the district court have jurisdiction to hold, in effect, that the EPA improperly approved an invalid (plan) because it lacked enforceable emission standards," the judges further declared.

Circuit Judges Diarmuid F. O'Scannlain, Michael Daly Hawkins and M. Margaret McKeown issued the opinion, authored by McKeown.

Legislature takes aim at urban sprawl and global warming

A bill calling for financial incentives to target greenhouse gases would be the first in the nation.

By Margot Roosevelt, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Thursday, Aug. 21, 2008

Will Californians drive less to reduce global warming? Maybe not on our own -- but state officials are ready to nudge us.

The Legislature is on the verge of adopting the nation's first law to control planet-warming gases by curbing sprawl. The bill, sponsored by incoming state senate leader Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento), is expected to pass the Assembly today and the Senate on Friday.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has not taken a position on the bill, but sponsors expect him to sign it once the state passes a budget.

The legislation, SB 375, would offer incentives to steer public funds away from sprawled development. The state spends about \$20 billion a year on transportation, and under the new law, projects that meet climate goals would get priority.

An earlier version of the bill was blocked last year by the building industry and by organizations representing cities and counties. Developers feared their suburban projects would be delayed or halted. Local officials were wary of ceding zoning powers and transportation planning to the state.

But momentum for the legislation has grown as the state seeks to implement its landmark 2006 global warming law, which would slash California's greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, a 30% cut from expected emissions. To accomplish that, state officials say, fuel-efficient cars and factories won't be enough. Subdivisions, commercial centers and highways must be planned so that Californians can live and work closer together, reducing the amount they drive.

"Our communities must change the way they grow," Steinberg said.

A compromise 17,000-word bill was hammered out this month and endorsed by builders, environmentalists and local officials. It requires the state's 17 metropolitan planning organizations and its regional transportation plans to meet concrete targets to reduce global-warming emissions. The targets will be set by the state Air Resources Board. "California led the way into our culture of car dependence, so it is only appropriate that the state lead the way out," said David Goldberg, a spokesman for Smart Growth America, a Washington-based nonprofit. The law could "provide a model for other states," he added, noting that the number of miles Americans drive has risen at more than double the rate of population growth in recent decades.

Scientists agree that the earth is heating up at a dangerous pace, in part because of excess carbon dioxide and other gases from vehicles, power plants and other human sources. The expected effects in California include coastal flooding from rising sea levels, reduced water supply and the disappearance of many species of plants and animals, according to researchers.

The legislation would lead to better-designed communities and save consumers on gas bills, advocates said. Thomas Adams, board president of the California League of Conservation Voters, called it the most important land-use bill in California since the Coastal Act in the 1970s. "It is also the first legislation to link transportation funding with climate policy," he said.

EPA plans to cite 5 Midwest states for pollution

By RICK CALLAHAN, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, Aug. 20, 2008

Indianapolis (AP) --Federal officials accuse five Midwest states of violating a new pollution standard for tiny soot particles that can cause respiratory distress in children and the elderly.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Tuesday that counties in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin have run afoul of rules demanding that outdoor pollution particles be no bigger than 2.5 micrometers - one-30th the diameter of a human hair.

Illinois has 14 counties on the list, Indiana has 19 counties, Michigan has 9 counties, Ohio has 28 counties and Wisconsin has 6 counties. Minnesota has no counties on the list. Nationwide, EPA intends to name 215 counties in 25 states as not meeting the new standard.

The EPA is seeking comments from the states before making its final designations. Being on the list makes it more difficult for counties to expand industry. The EPA said it intends to settle on its final soot nonattainment list by Dec. 18.

Counties included on that list would face pressure to cut levels of microscopic soot produced by power plants, diesel-burning trucks, cars and factories.

Those tiny particles lodge in people's lungs and blood vessels and are a major contributor to respiratory problems, especially in children, the elderly and people with existing illnesses.

State and local governments have three years to develop plans to reduce emissions and attain the standards, said EPA environmental scientist John Summerhays.

The list came as a surprise in Indiana, which had suggested that only five of its counties be cited. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management said Tuesday that the agency hopes the EPA removes some of the Indiana counties from its final list.

"Monitoring data shows that Indiana's air quality continues to improve," spokesman Rob Elstro said in a statement, adding that his agency was "cautiously optimistic" the final list "will not include as many counties as today's preliminary designations."

His counterpart in Illinois disputed the designation for that state's Rock Island and Massac counties. Illinois Environmental Protection Agency spokeswoman Maggie Carson said available air quality monitoring data, prevailing wind direction and the location and size of emission sources show the counties shouldn't be listed.

"We will be submitting additional analyses to USEPA to support our position," Carson said in a statement. "We are hopeful that USEPA will carefully examine this information and respond accordingly."

The EPA said in 1997 that cutting fine-particle pollution would save 15,000 people a year from premature deaths due to heart and lung diseases aggravated by soot-filled air.

Tim Maloney, senior policy director for the Hoosier Environmental Council, said the 19 Indiana counties are mainly the same counties that were on the EPA's fine particle nonattainment list under its previous standard.

But he said Knox and Tippecanoe counties - in largely rural areas of southwestern and north-central Indiana - are new to the updated list and that raises questions about what factors are behind those counties' inclusion on the EPA's proposed list.

"We'll want to look and see what the difference is and whether we should be more conservative and include even more counties," Maloney said. "There are very real and serious health effects from these particles."

The new standard is important because it takes into account growing concerns about short-term exposure to fine particles that can lodge deep in the lungs, said Janet McCabe, executive director of Improving Kids' Environment, an Indianapolis nonprofit working to reduce environmental threats to children's health.

"There's more and more health evidence suggesting that short-term exposure to fine particles can really have a health impact," she said. "Just standing on the sidewalk, breathing in exhaust for a few minutes can impact your health."

Change is in the wind

Scientists are at work reducing livestock methane's large carbon hoof print

By Michael Hawthorne, CHICAGO TRIBUNE

San Diego Union-Tribune, Aug. 21, 2008

Burgeoning efforts to curb global-warming pollution are taking aim at an unlikely new target: the placid, cud-chewing cow.

Scientists have long known that cattle and other livestock are major contributors to climate change worldwide, and although researchers, regulators and activists have devoted most of their attention to other culprits – such as cars and coal-fired power plants – that is starting to change.

As dairy and beef cows chew and rechew their feed, their belches and other gastric eruptions produce enormous quantities of methane, a greenhouse gas 23 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

All that cow flatulence is bad enough, but clearing forests for pastures and the manufacturing of fertilizers to grow cattle feed produce even more greenhouse gases. When those sources are considered, the United Nations estimates that the world's livestock system is a bigger part of the problem than transportation.

The impact is great enough that researchers are stepping up efforts to limit bovine burps by tinkering with cattle feed. Some large dairies are pumping the millions of gallons of manure they produce into bacteria-filled tanks that capture methane and use it to generate electricity.

Changes are quietly taking place at supermarkets and dinner tables, too. Bon Appetit Management Co., which operates 400 cafes at universities, museums and corporate offices in the United States, is pushing to cut the firm's greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent, in part by limiting the amount of beef and cheese served.

“People still don't get the impact of food as a significant contributor to climate change or the environment in general,” said Helene York, who directs Bon Appetit's Low Carbon Diet. “But there are ways big and small that we can change the culture.”

More carbon-efficient management of livestock, manure and food production almost assuredly will be required if Congress moves next year to reduce the nation's contributions to climate change.

Methane is a big concern because it is so much more potent than carbon dioxide, the chief source of man-made pollution behind rising global temperatures. So is nitrous oxide, another byproduct of manure and fertilizer production. It has a whopping 296 times the heat-trapping potential of carbon dioxide.

Domestic cattle packed into feedlots and dairies might seem like an unlikely part of the problem. But because ruminants eat enormous amounts of hay, corn and other feed, then belch it up again and again as they chew their cud, a single cow can produce up to 400 pounds of methane a year.

The manure they leave behind is a malodorous mess that churns even more methane into the air. All told, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that livestock burps, flatulence and waste account for more than a quarter of the nation's methane emissions, second only to decomposing garbage in landfills.

In the rolling hills of northwest Illinois, where the pungent scent of cow digestion fills the air, Doug and Tom Block have figured out a way to turn the familiar stink of dairy farming into cash.

When the brothers decided a few years ago to expand their farm, they installed a huge device called a methane digester. Several times a day, the waste from more than 800 cows is dumped into a bacteria-filled tank that breaks down the muck and captures methane, which fuels a pair of hulking electrical generators nearby.

Cow power, as the Blocks call it, provides about a third of the dairy's electricity. It also makes the brothers money through the Chicago Climate Exchange, a voluntary network of corporations and governments that trades credits for greenhouse gas emissions, similar to the way milk and beef futures are bought and sold.

By keeping methane out of the atmosphere, the dairy farmers get to sell carbon credits to companies that fail to meet their pledges to reduce global warming pollution. The arrangement recently netted the Blocks a \$24,000 check, and has turned the former climate-change skeptics into true believers.

"We're greedy dairy farmers, but as we got into this, we started to understand how what happens on the farm can help solve a big problem," Doug Block said. "These carbon credits are an encouragement for people and companies to do the right thing."

Cleaner cows

Another possible solution to the world's methane problems is emerging from university laboratories. In recent years researchers have tried to come up with feed additives that cut down on cow belches – and emissions from the other end of the animal.

A group of Japanese scientists reported earlier this year that they had happened upon a methane-reducing formula of nitrates and cysteine, an amino acid. In Australia, researchers are testing a biologically engineered grass that acts like a bovine antacid. There also are nascent attempts at several U.S. colleges to perfect what amounts to Beano for cows.

Lab experiments show some promise in lowering methane concentrations in cow stomachs and boosting the amount of other compounds that give the animals energy. But it's unclear if and when any of the additives might move from the lab to the barn.

"This hasn't been a big issue until now," said Frank Mitloehner, director of the Agricultural Air Quality Center at the University of California Davis, who is helping devise ways to meet California's initiative to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020.

Farmers and agricultural researchers also can help, Mitloehner said, by improving the health and productivity of dairy cattle so they don't need to be replaced as frequently. Raising backup herds creates more greenhouse gases.

"I think we can get there," Mitloehner said. "We just need to change the way of thinking in the agricultural community."

Changes already are happening at the other end of the food-production line. Hardly a week goes by without an announcement by one of the nation's food service companies or grocery chains that it is embracing greener practices such as energy efficiency and waste reduction.

The average American meat-oriented diet produces 3,000 more pounds of carbon dioxide each year than a calorie-equivalent vegan, or plant-based, diet, according to a 2006 University of Chicago study. Opting for chicken instead of beef saves about 2,250 pounds.

[Merced Sun-Star, Opinion, Thursday, Aug. 21, 2008:](#)

Our View: The approach for cleaner air

Driving less would do more for state than urging 'efficient driving.'

With California attempting to lead the states in reducing carbon emissions, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is pushing solutions not only through policy but also individual action.

The governor is making a push to get individuals to take responsibility for their own fuel use -- saving money at the gas pump and contributing in their own small way to reducing global warming.

Schwarzenegger is the spokesman for a new education initiative called EcoDriving USA, with support from automakers, auto dealers and the Environmental Defense Fund.

In that role, he makes a powerful pitch: "We hear a lot of ideas from politicians about lowering the gas prices and fighting global warming, whether it's biofuels, offshore drilling or nuclear power.

But none of those will affect the gas prices right now. Only you can do that."

He gives specifics on how to reduce fuel costs by more than 15 percent: "I'm talking about simple things like proper tire pressure, avoiding rapid starts and stops, and keeping your engine tuned."

He concludes that "we don't have to wait for the politicians to take action. Each of us has the power to make a difference, right now."

Schwarzenegger also encourages people to "buy a hybrid car that gets 50 miles to the gallon."

What's disappointing, however, is how minimalist Schwarzenegger's approach is -- limited to promoting more efficient use of gasoline.

He could instead use his star power to encourage real conservation -- using other modes of transportation (walking, biking, carpooling or riding transit) and planning ahead to combine car trips ("trip chaining").

Such practices not only save gas but also reduce air pollution and traffic congestion.

We'd like to see Schwarzenegger issue a conservation challenge. Why not ask Californians to eliminate two (or more) car trips a week?

A "drive less" campaign would be a more effective way to jump-start alternatives than a "drive efficiently" campaign.

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, Aug. 21, 2008:](#)

Don't help the polluters

No one can deny that the San Joaquin Valley is plagued by poor air quality. The Bee is right to urge a cleanup of the exhaust from ports and freight transportation that kills thousands of Californians each year [editorial Aug. 15].

The Bee is also right to support a container fee that would help fund this cleanup. After four years of analysis and debate, the Ports Investment Bill (SB 974) has emerged as the best funding option available, and the governor should sign it.

Unfortunately, opponents of this bill -- including Wal-Mart -- want to avoid paying their fair share. Let's not let industry use the Valley's best clean-air intentions to derail this good piece of legislation.

SB 974 will help fund cleaner trucks and trains that service the ports, including those that travel through the Valley. The law restricts how fees from SB 974 can be spent. While well-intentioned, efforts to spend this money on non-container transportation in the Valley would be a gift to industry lawyers.

The Valley needs cleaner air, as do port communities. SB 974 is a statewide approach that will help the Valley. Derailing it would help no one but the polluters.

Laura A. Fultz

Campaign and outreach associate, Coalition for Clean Air, Fresno

Power play

I support those in Southern California affected by the Sunrise Power Link, a 150-mile long, 500-kilovolt transmission project being forced on them by the government and the big utilities that run the government.

Utilities like San Diego Gas and Electric, Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas and Electric are hurting thousands of people across the country. Citizens hear little about property owners forced to sell land to powerful corporations for these destructive projects.

The utilities' deceptive ads tell only one side of the story: They are bringing in needed renewable energy to help fight global warming.

The dark side is that they use eminent domain and greatly harm the environment, with millions of acres of open space ruined by gigantic solar and wind plants and thousands of miles of ugly transmission lines.

Generators belong on rooftops, where they don't require additional land or transmission lines. In Germany, with far less sun than the U.S., many gigawatts of rooftop solar are being added. Why not here?

It's all about money: Powerful utilities control the marketplace and the government, and they make it difficult for small generators to feed into the grid.

Charles M. "Chip" Ashley

President, Save the Foothills Coalition, Tollhouse

[Modesto Bee, Letters to the Editor, Thursday, Aug.21, 2008:](#)

I plan to ignore burning restrictions

We heat our house with wood and have for several years. It is cheaper and a much better heat than using gas. I have an insert in my fireplace, start my fire when the weather gets cold and keep the coals going until it warms up again.

By putting a large log in at night, the coals are kept until morning. In the morning I throw a couple of pieces in and turn on my coffee pot. By the time I'm dressed, the coffee is ready and I step outdoors to get my Bee. Coming back into my nice, warm house, I open the paper. Oh, my God! It's a no-burn day.

If anyone thinks I'm going to get a bucket of water and put my fire out, they are mistaken. I live in the country, where there is probably one wood burner per 50 acres. Where you could have six or seven per acre in the city, I can see the point of limiting burning. Out here, the smoke dissipates pretty fast and does not bother my asthma.

If air pollution control wants my fire out, they had better bring a bucket of water.

DAVID ENRIKEN, Ceres

Make Bay, foothills stop burning

Regarding "Stricter wood-burning rules sought" (Aug. 17, Page B-1): The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District staff needs to take a step outdoors once in a while. They may notice two very distinct facts.

We live in a valley, and the predominant wind is from the west. The entire Bay Area has smog and no burning restrictions. Why? Because they have clean air. With millions of cars and fireplaces, where does their smog go? Which way does the wind blow?

The foothill counties have no smog, and no burning restrictions. Why? They have clean air. Where does their smog go? Over the Sierras or settle in the valley?

The residents of the valley keep paying for imported bad air. How many millions of people contribute to the valley's air problems? Perhaps the pollution control board can take some action to control pollution at its sources.

AL SIDELL, Waterford