

Officials brace for 100,000 visitors at Ag Expo

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2009

TULARE, Calif. -- Organizers are expecting 100,000 visitors from 67 countries at the World Ag Expo this week.

Billed as the largest agricultural trade show in the world, the Tuesday through Thursday event pumps \$1.2 billion into the region's economy.

In addition to 1,600 exhibitors, the expo includes seminars on international trade, the benefits to farmers of the 2008 federal Farm Bill, immigration and labor issues and air quality challenges facing agriculture.

The Expo, in its 42nd year, is being held at the International Agricultural Center Inc. in Tulare.

Clover Valley opponents vow to keep fighting

By Bob Walter

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2009

Developers and the city of Rocklin have won two crucial courtroom victories in their crusade to build more than 400 houses in Clover Valley, 622 acres just west of Sierra College Boulevard that represent some of Rocklin's last open space.

But opponents of the housing plan said Monday that they are not finished fighting, and one of the developers said the recession almost certainly will stall the plan for years.

Sacramento Superior Court Judge Lloyd Connelly ruled late Friday against suits filed by the Sierra Club, the Clover Valley Foundation and the town of Loomis. The suits sought to overturn Rocklin's approval of a plan that allows Clover Valley Partners, led by Rick Massie and Dave Garst, to build 558 homes in the valley.

That plan was ratified by Rocklin voters a year ago.

A pending sale of 154 lots to the United Auburn Indian Community – to be used for open space and a cultural center – would reduce the number of houses to 404, but that deal hinges on the lawsuits.

Rocklin Mayor Peter Hill said Monday that Connelly's ruling was not a surprise. "We were convinced that we had done the right thing all the way through," he said.

Sierra Club spokeswoman Marilyn Jasper said the Clover Valley opponents were surprised, but would not comment about a potential appeal.

"The ruling is a setback," Jasper said, "but the issue is far from over."

Opponents claim the plan would destroy wildlife and Indian historical sites while spurring traffic and air pollution. Their suit claimed the environmental impact report failed to comply with provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act.

The Loomis suit sought mitigation for additional traffic on Sierra College Boulevard and roads to schools in the Loomis School District.

Loomis Town Manager Perry Beck said he was disappointed with the ruling. Connelly heard the case on a change of venue from Placer County because Loomis and Rocklin were opposing parties. "We have to evaluate whether it is worth appealing," Beck said, "but the judge did not appear to leave many openings."

Both Beck and Hill said they hope the ruling might spur negotiations over a string of Rocklin/Loomis border disputes. Loomis has filed similar suits over Rocklin's approval of Rocklin Crossing, a Wal-Mart-anchored center at Sierra College Boulevard and Interstate 80, and another big-box development at Granite Drive and Sierra College.

Meanwhile, Hill and developer Massie said the recession is liable to slow development of Clover Valley even more than the legal wrangling.

"We will have to wait for the economy to turn around, and who knows how long that will take," Massie said.

He said the developers are facing \$120 million in costs for roads, sewers and utilities before construction could begin.

Jasper, president of the Clover Valley Foundation and chair of the Sierra Club's Placer Group, said she still hopes to forge a consortium that can buy the entire valley and turn it into a historic nature preserve.

Massie said such a plan could be revisited.

"We are realistic, market-driven people," he said. "If this decision gives them cause to ring the bell and get into a conversation, we are willing to talk."

800 tons of hay burn near Lemoore Naval Air Station

Monday, Feb. 09, 2009

By Eddie Jimenez / The Fresno Bee

Spontaneous combustion is suspected as the cause of a [fire that burned 800 tons of hay](#) at a dairy today near the Lemoore Naval Air Station.

Kings County firefighters have the blaze under control, but will remain at the dairy at 24th Avenue and Grangeville Boulevard throughout the night and into Tuesday, said Battalion Chief Frank Rohan.

The blaze at Lima Dairy northeast of the air station was reported at 11:46 a.m. today.

Rohan said as wet bales of hay cure they become hot and can smolder. As they are exposed to oxygen, the bales can spontaneously combust and ignite a fire, he said.

Firefighters are monitoring the blaze, he said.

"We're trying not to put too much water on it because it prolongs the fire," Rohan said.

The dairy is continuing to operate and no buildings are threatened, he said.

No one has been injured in the fire, Rohan said.

Study: Warming climate to hurt Calif bird species

By JASON DEAREN - Associated Press Writer

Tri-Valley Herald and Modesto Bee, Tuesday, February 10, 2009

SAN FRANCISCO—Since 1967, birder and teacher Gene Cardiff has trekked with students to California's mountains and deserts to catch a glimpse of the white-headed woodpecker, or other rare sights.

But Cardiff, an ornithologist who lives near San Bernardino, said the state's drought conditions over the past few years have devastated bird food sources in his area's forests and deserts, leading to fewer birds to watch.

"I can't do a good job teaching my class because there are no birds to see," said Cardiff. "It's a sinking feeling."

A new Audubon California study released Tuesday finds that the state will lose significant numbers of its native birds as climate change quickly shrinks the range and habitat of more than 100 species.

The state predictions are based on models of future climates, and serve as a companion to a national Audubon Society study, also released Tuesday. That study, using data collected over the past 40 years, determined that 177 bird species in the U.S. are spending the winter farther north because of a warming world.

In California, scientists worry that the quickly warming climate might not only force certain species to move northward, but wipe out others that are not quick to adapt.

"Major climate variables influencing species' distributions are expected to change so quickly that even highly mobile species like birds will be unable to keep pace," the report states.

Still, the news is not all dire: The study also suggests that significant curbs on greenhouse gas emissions and investment in conservation can greatly reduce the damage.

The California study presents scenarios for 313 native-Californian bird species using models that predict different future climates based on low-to-high reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.

The news is most alarming for birds like the yellow-billed magpie, which only exist in California. The study found that the species would lose about 75 percent of its range in coming decades under a high emission scenario, but only about 9 percent if pollution is reduced significantly.

"For years, people have made big conservation investments with their fingers crossed that their good work won't simply be erased by climate change in a few years," said Bill Monahan, senior scientist at Audubon California who co-authored the state study. "Having a sense of what the landscape actually will look like 50, or even 100, years into the future will allow us to make much better conservation investments today."

Other factors contributing to the shift in bird range include urban sprawl and the increase in backyard bird feeders. But the researchers say global warming will continue to be the most significant factor for decades to come.

The Audubon researchers hope their report will help state leaders lessen climate change's effects by identifying the areas and species most in need of attention. The study also lauds California's plan to implement a landmark 2006 law that has made the state a global leader in combating climate change.

"Birds are showing us how the heavy hand of humanity is tipping the balance of nature and causing ecological disruption in ways we are just beginning to predict and comprehend," said Greg Butcher, a co-author of the national report and Audubon director of bird conservation.

L.A. Unified launches solar energy program

The school district announces a \$350-million goal of putting enough solar panels on schools and other district buildings to generate 50 megawatts of electricity by 2012 and lower its electricity bill.

By Mitchell Landsberg

LA Times, Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2009

When the writer's strike left him idle last year, Jeremy Kromberg decided to give up on the film industry, where he had worked in postproduction, and slide in on the ground floor of the next big thing. That is how the 37-year-old from Hollywood found himself at an adult school on the Eastside on Monday, practicing his technique for fastening solar panels onto rooftops.

"We just do it over and over," he said. "We build them up and tear them down just as fast as we can."

Not that he minds. Kromberg was enthusiastic about the program at the East Los Angeles Skills Center, which will allow him to become a certified solar energy technician. He figures that, with the economy crashing down around him, he will be well placed to take advantage of what promises to be a public spending boom in solar energy, beginning with a \$350-million program launched Monday by the Los Angeles Unified School District.

In an announcement at the Skills Center, L.A. Unified officials said the district had set a goal of putting enough solar panels on schools and other district buildings to generate 50 megawatts of electricity by 2012. That is enough energy to power as many as 50,000 homes, though the district will use it to light schools and lower its \$80-million annual electricity bill.

The "We Build Green" program may cost taxpayers more money than it will ultimately save in energy use. Randy Britt, the district's director of sustainability, said the solar installations should save about \$12.5 million a year for 20 to 25 years, for a maximum of about \$320 million. Still, district officials said the program will also create jobs and provide enough of an economic stimulus to more than pay for itself.

"We are fighting for our economic lives," said David Crippins, chairman of the district's school construction bond oversight committee, in remarks to students in the solar installation program. "What you are doing is absolutely essential, because we must become energy independent and, especially here in California, we must create our own jobs."

The concept of the program is not dissimilar to the idea behind Measure B on the March 3 ballot, which would require the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to install 400 megawatts of solar generating capacity by 2014. For its program, L.A. Unified will train solar installers in its adult schools, using a curriculum developed at the East Los Angeles Center by teacher Brian Hurd.

The program has already turned out 300 graduates, and Hurd said their skills are in such demand that some have been hired by private contractors before they even finish the three-month basic course of study.

Money for the school district's program comes primarily from Measure Q on last November's ballot, which authorized the sale of \$7 billion in bonds to pay for school construction and modernization.

However, the 50 megawatts also includes 1 megawatt from solar panels installed late last year on a Pico Rivera warehouse and 3.7 megawatts from panels to be installed soon on seven schools and one other site. Those eight installations are to be paid for by DWP, partially with money the district won when it settled a 2000 lawsuit against the utility complaining of overcharging. The school board is expected to authorize that expenditure today.

[LA Times, Opinion, Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2009:](#)

A to-do list for Clinton's China trip

The secretary of State should push for Beijing's help on the economy, nuclear proliferation, climate change and pandemic disease.

By Nina Hachigian

LA Times, Tuesday, February 10, 2009

The debate about whether to engage China is over -- we are now about 20 years into a common-law marriage. The debate about whether China will join the international community is also over. Beijing has been signing up for multilateral forums as if they were going out of style. The great challenge for Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton when she visits Beijing next week is to influence China to play a larger role in preventing global catastrophes in these areas: the economy, nuclear proliferation, climate change and pandemic disease.

China deserves high marks for acting quickly on the global economic crisis. Beijing turned on a dime from trying to cool down its economy last summer to enacting potentially potent stimulus measures over the last months. Some measures, such as a plan to invest \$123 billion in universal health insurance over the next three years, could lay the foundation for a social safety net that will help establish a broad Chinese middle class, which would support the growth of the American middle class by fostering a robust market for U.S. exports. Moreover, working with the International Monetary Fund, Beijing is helping to bail out Pakistan, whose economic stability the United States is concerned about, to put it mildly.

The politically challenging issues of currency, intellectual property protection and the potential "Buy American" provisions of the U.S. economic stimulus package remain and could get worse, but they have proved manageable through regular consultation with Congress and steady dialogue with Beijing.

On efforts to prevent potential nuclear catastrophes, China's record is mixed. Beijing is playing an invaluable leadership role in hosting the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program and has been instrumental in breaking specific logjams. But Beijing still cares much more about stability on the Korean peninsula than it does about North Korea's nukes (which are not aimed at China, after all). Whether and under what conditions Pyongyang would give up its weapons, and how much arm-twisting China would be willing to do, are unclear. Clinton is sure to make a strong pitch for more Chinese pressure, but here Beijing and Washington have at least agreed on a path forward.

In contrast, on nuclear catastrophe scenario No. 2 -- Iran's program -- China and the U.S. sharply diverge. China has repeatedly blocked U.S. efforts in the U.N. Security Council to impose tough sanctions on Tehran. Beijing does not want to see a Middle East made even more dangerous by complicated nuclear dynamics, but China's immediate and pressing lust for energy supplies will leave its anti-proliferation policies compromised at best. Prospects for Clinton to make headway on this issue seem dim.

That brings us to climate change. Global warming will demand the most creative and intense diplomacy the Obama team has to offer. China's energy demand is mind-blowing in scale. From 2001 through 2007,

China's consumption increased by an amount equal to energy use in all of Latin America, according to Asia energy expert Mikkal Herberg.

China is firmly opposed to hard targets for reducing its ballooning [greenhouse gas emissions](#), arguing, with reason, that the West caused the global warming crisis and bears the burden of responsibility. But without China on board, the world will not be able to reduce greenhouse gases to the level that scientists think is necessary to avoid catastrophic effects.

You know things are bad when avian flu seems like a bright spot. But there's reason for guarded optimism that China will handle outbreaks responsibly: A Chinese doctor heads the World Health Organization, more money is headed for rural healthcare in China, and Beijing learned from the SARS crisis earlier this decade that the potentially devastating effect of a pandemic is exacerbated when its early cases are covered up.

What tack, then, should Clinton take in her first trip abroad as secretary of State to maximize the chances of progress in preventing these global catastrophes?

First, while making plain our differences (on human rights, China's military buildup, currency, Darfur, Tibet and other issues), she should make clear that China is a strategic partner in crucial areas and that the United States welcomes China's integration into the international system as a responsible, respected and engaged stakeholder.

She also should pave the way for new, bold initiatives based on "strategic collaboration." One potentially fruitful area is clean energy research, with the United States and China, or a group of the major energy consumers, joining forces.

In her confirmation hearing, Clinton indicated that in dealing with other nations she would maintain her focus on the entire relationship and not allow single issues to set the tone and direction. That is the right approach, but that does not prevent her from prioritizing U.S. interests around these four challenges in her talks in Beijing. It is in the nature of our deeply interdependent relationship to have a long list of issues that we want action on from China, but we are likely to see more progress if we can be clear about which are most important.

Negotiating with China is never easy. But neither China nor the United States can prevent these catastrophes alone.

Nina Hachigian is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2009:](#)

Make state meet air standards

Regarding "Governor calls on Obama, asks new president for help regulating auto emissions" (Jan. 22, Page A-6): This must be a joke! Arnold wants tighter emission standards from us? We comply with the law or else no registration for our vehicles. We pay tooth and nail to comply for that dumb little sticker. I just paid more than \$300 for something not related to smog in order to shut off the light on my dashboard in order to pass, not to mention the \$200-plus registration fee!

Let's make the state, counties, cities and all that have exempt license plates do the same. If California wants to lead the way in being green, show me the money to make all police, fire, emergency and state vehicles go through the same process we do. This just might help out local smog shops and mechanics that produce taxable revenue for our state. If not, stop making our lives hell to go through this. We are broke.

LAWRENCE CLINE II, Patterson

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2009:](#)

We want the truth

Lois Henry's columns are always thought-provoking, but the recent commentary about the phony science used to ratchet down air-quality regulations was a welcome revelation. I thank her for taking the time to look behind the rules that are ruling our lives.

It seems the Environmental Protection Agency is justifying its dictums by using the same junk science it used in justifying and promoting the spreading of sewage sludge on farmland. I can sympathize with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the EPA's front-line enforcer. A few years ago, a brave EPA scientist challenged the science used to turn sewage sludge into "biosolids" that was supposed to be good for farmland, heavy metals and all.

We need another intelligent challenge of the "science" used to connect thousands of illnesses to particulate matter.

I also resent the fact that stationary sources of emissions (our industries, and you and me and our fireplaces) have been forced to comply with ever-changing new rules to clean the air, while the EPA and the Congress dragged their collective feet for decades in regulating clean diesel trucks, one of our major sources of pollution.

The EPA is in charge of regulating mobile sources. There were about 20,000 18-wheelers driving through Kern County each day a few years ago. It's probably up to 30,000 by now.

Thank you, Lois, for shining the light on a murky subject. You do us all a favor for asking more questions. We want clean air, but we also want the truth.

MARY K. SHELL, Bakersfield