

Science-based air regs make sense

By RICHARD COTTA



GUEST EDITORIAL

In June, California air regulators passed landmark air quality regulations for dairies. The *Fresno Bee* correctly called it “the most sweeping dairy air pollution rule in the country.” Known as Rule 4570, it covers dairies with 1,000 or more milking cows across the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, roughly from Bakersfield to Stockton. Similar versions of the rule are being adopted in southern California and the Sacramento region.

The San Joaquin air district estimates it will cost dairies about \$26 million annually to comply with the new regulations. However, the rule represents significant progress for the dairy and livestock industry and for valley air quality. This progress was accomplished through a concerted effort to focus on science, support research and collaborate with regulators on the shared goal of cleaner air.

The 2003 passage of Senate Bill 700 (Florez), gave air regulators until mid-2006 to come up with regulations for confined animal feeding operations. From the beginning, the dairy industry’s environmental coalition, the Community

Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship, strongly advocated that the resulting regulations be grounded solidly in science. CARES and its members have worked hard to assist regulators in developing a solid science basis for the regulations.

Unfortunately, initial approaches by air regulators were far from science-based. Facing a tight \$700 deadline, regulators started writing rules before the science was in. They speculated about nearly everything: the overall amount, sources on the dairy, what was being emitted and even how to control whatever the emissions were.

Debate without science

In a debate without science and facts, anti-dairy activists called for expensive mandated technologies even though no one could prove they worked. Faced with draft rules that would have required unproven technologies to be installed on many dairies, such as covered lagoon anaerobic digesters, CARES and its members were forced to litigate. The group’s 2004 legal settlement with the air district did not delay regula-

tions, but it did force a serious, comprehensive look at the scientific issues.

CARES stepped up to share the cost of the research, contributing about one-third of the nearly half million dollars in scientific research performed in the past year. However this was not industry research — oversight remained with the California Air Resources Board and the San Joaquin air district. The research showed that the majority of emissions from dairies originate in feedlots and corrals, not lagoons, as was previously thought.

Science saved millions

This lesson should resound across California’s livestock and dairy industry: Getting the science right saved millions, if not billions, of dollars. Anaerobic digesters, a great renewable-energy technology, are completely ineffective in reducing the types of emissions that form smog. We learned this lesson just in time to adjust our course and avoid regulations that would have been a colossal waste of money for dairy producers and a giant embarrassment for air regulators.

Instead, Rule 4570 is a flexible menu of management options, so producers can customize their emission reduction strategy to their individual operation. It is precisely the approach supported by the National Academies of Science,

and it allows room for adjustment as we learn more about livestock emissions and the best ways to control them.

Rule 4570 protects air quality by reducing dairy emissions by an estimated 30%. In fact, Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the SJVAPCD, says “The recently adopted rule on animal facilities will reduce smog-forming chemicals valleywide by at least 21 tons per day. That’s equivalent to removing more than 1 million cars from valley roads.”

Our progress shows what can be accomplished when dairy and livestock industry groups work together to resist policy that isn’t based in science. It also shows the power of collaboration on a positive, science-based approach.

Follow example for water

Even as the ink is drying on the air quality rule, Central Valley water quality regulators are preparing a historic set of water quality regulations to comply with 1999’s S.390, which ended blanket water quality waivers for dairies. The air quality experience suggests that the model of science-based approaches to dairy regulations will produce the best results for the environment and for dairy producers.

Cotta is president of CARES and senior vice president of California Dairies Inc. Learn more at www.dairycares.com, or write to dairycares@aol.com.

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