



Dairy CARES Report

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Fresno puts an end to era of ‘by-right’ dairies

The Fresno County Board of Supervisors on October 23 adopted a historic new ordinance for existing, expanding and new dairy projects in the county. For the first time, the county will now require “conditional use permits” for dairy projects. Though it may not seem obvious at first glance, this is a good move for the dairy industry and Fresno County.

Fresno was the last major dairy county in California to end ‘by-right’ dairy projects. Most other important dairy counties began requiring conditional use permits several years ago. Virtually all new dairy projects already require air pollution permits and waste discharge requirements issued by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. But lack of a permitting process in Fresno County left in doubt which agency was in the “lead” for determining the overall environmental impacts of a new or expanding project. This lack of a leader didn’t make it easier for dairies – it just caused a lot of confusion.

With its new ordinance, Fresno County becomes the clear “lead agency” for approving dairies. Experience shows that county governments are best suited to the job of weighing the economic benefits of new dairy projects against their potential impacts and finding a balance.

Passage of the ordinance makes the process for upgrading, expanding or building new dairies in Fresno County more sensible on paper. But serious issues remain related to continued attacks by anti-dairy activists. Before the supervisors this month, and before the Planning Commission in September, activists packed the hearing room to insist the county require more stringent controls on dairy projects. We can expect similar behavior as dairy projects come forward.

Fortunately, a majority of supervisors understood that dairies in Fresno County are already under the nation’s most stringent air and water quality regulations, enforced by regional air and water quality authorities. They also understood that all new and expanding dairies must comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which means a project must prepare an Environmental Impact Report and undergo public hearings before it can be approved.

For the past year, CARES coalition members worked closely with Fresno County government and the Fresno County Farm Bureau to ensure the fairest ordinance possible, one that encourages development of environmentally friendly dairies. We explained carefully and repeatedly the complex regulations dairies already face. Not everyone listened, but many did and ultimately, these efforts were successful. CARES will continue to work hard to educate valley communities about the efforts California dairy families have made to achieve the highest levels of environmental performance anywhere.

CARES is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability for California’s dairy industry. CARES members include the Alliance of Western Milk Producers, Bank of the West, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, Crystal Cream & Butter, Dairy Farmers of America-California, Dairy Institute of California, Hilmar Cheese Co., Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O’ Lakes, Milk Producers Council, Saputo Cheese, Turlock Dairy & Refrigeration, Western United Dairywomen, and others. For information about CARES, visit our web site at www.dairycares.com, write dairycares@aol.com or call 916-441-3318.