

Smashing and Recycling Old Tractors Helps Assure Air Quality Benefits for the San Joaquin Valley

Written by Australian Business

FRESNO, Calif., Sept. 24, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Farmers are well known for their ability to tinker and innovate to keep farm equipment running for years and years. But sometimes you've got to let the old equipment go.

Jason Weller, Chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), with help from machinery operators at Bruno's Iron and Metal in Fresno

, today demonstrated the process that the local agricultural and regulatory leaders have agreed upon for destroying old, higher-polluting agricultural equipment. Together they reduced a 20,000 pound tractor to a metal cube that would never plow another field with its old, less efficient engine.

Weller was joined in his tractor smashing demonstration by Jared Blumenfeld, administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency Region 9; Lynn Terry, deputy executive officer of the California Air Resources Board; and Seyed Sadredin, executive director and air pollution control officer of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Sandra Schubert

, undersecretary for

California's

Department of Food and Agriculture, and

Manuel Cunha Jr.

of the Nisei Farmers League made comments on behalf of the farming community. Using incentive programs, farmers who agree to destroy their old equipment can replace it with the cleanest technology. Those new engines typically run 75 percent cleaner than the old ones.

Using this approach, over 3,200 California farmers have been able to reduce NOx emissions (ozone precursors) by some 3,400 tons/year since 2009 while replacing over 3,200 pieces of high-emitting equipment. This is roughly *the equivalent of removing more than one million cars from California highways*

. About 93 percent of these reductions are occurring in the San Joaquin Valley

, which has some of the most impaired air quality in the nation. "What you're doing

here—having the farming and regulatory communities work together, ahead of regulation—to set up a framework that farmers can adopt and regulators agree provides the needed air quality improvements, is remarkable," said Weller. "Other areas of the country could learn a lot from what is happening here," he said.

"The tractor replacement program is a perfect example of a successful public/private partnership; bringing together multiple public agencies and the agricultural industry to provide assistance in replacing old farm equipment and achieving much-needed emissions reductions in the Valley," said Seyed Sadredin, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's executive director and air pollution control officer.

In an effort to obtain even more near-term emission reductions, the Air District is partnering with the agricultural industry on an innovative and first-of-its-kind tractor trade-up pilot program. This pilot program allows growers with the oldest tractors to trade up to newer units that are in turn being replaced by brand new tractors. This three-way trade up program allows growers that would perhaps not otherwise be able to participate in the program to get into newer, cleaner tractors for little out of pocket cost. At today's event Sadredin, along with Caterpillar Tractor company, presented the keys of a trade up tractor, to farmer Will Scott, who is one of the first to participate in the new version of the engine replacement program.

Lynn Terry, Deputy executive officer for California Air Resources Board also spoke, saying, "Today's event recognizes that California's commitment to clean air includes innovative incentive programs that promote technology advancement. The willingness of the agricultural community to invest in a clean technology future for the Valley will have real public health benefits."

"California's Central Valley is one of the world's most productive agricultural regions," said Jared Blumenfeld, EPA's regional administrator for the Pacific Southwest. "With this partnership, EPA, USDA and local champions like Manuel Cunha, will be helping farmers switch out their old and dirty tractors for some of the cleanest running ag equipment on the planet. Once again, we appreciate the ag community working together to clean-up the valley's air."

"We would like to acknowledge USDA-NRCS, EPA, ARB, and the Air District, as well as

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farmers and ranchers, for their efforts in cleaning the air. The incentive funding from NRCS, the Air District, and ARB through Carl Moyer funding has given farmers the opportunity to replace older tractors with newer, cleaner burning equipment. The new equipment is helping the Valley and the state achieve our air quality goals ahead of time. This would never have been achieved without the agencies agreeing to the Memorandum of Understanding," said Manuel Cunha, Jr., president of the Nisei Farmers League.

"This is an excellent way to highlight the voluntary steps taken by farmers to reduce air pollution and become more sustainable," said Sandra Schubert, undersecretary for California Department of Food and Agriculture. "We greatly appreciate NRCS and the California Air Resources Board for their tireless efforts to ensure that farmers' actions are taken into account when determining air pollution reductions. We hope this will serve as a model for other compliance efforts."

Farmers, NRCS, and the regulatory community, have been working hard for over a decade to decrease agricultural pollution. In the past 20 years, the San Joaquin Valley has seen a 60 percent decrease in NOx emissions, a key component of smog. The destruction and recycling of old, polluting equipment, as demonstrated at Bruno's today, is an important part of this success and assures regulators and the public that these voluntary achievements are real and verifiable, and contribute to cleaner air in the Valley.

SOURCE USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service

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