

Alexander Sherriffs and William B. Marcus: Clean-energy economy for the Valley

By Alexander Sherriffs and William B. Marcus

The San Joaquin Valley is a remarkable place. It has played a vital role in the development of the economy and the character of the state. The Midway-Sunset and Kern Oil Fields produced over 5 billion barrels of oil since being discovered in the 1890s. Natural water run-off and later some of the world's largest public works brought water to the Valley floor creating an agricultural treasure, producing 250 different crops, half the nation's fruits, vegetables and table foods, and one third of its milk.

The Valley has been sharing the fruits of its natural endowments with others for over a century, but many of the negative impacts have stayed local while the benefits were exported. Our transportation corridors are critical to the regional, state and national economy, but not without local impacts: While goods movement has gotten cleaner, diesel emissions are still the No. 1 cause of cancer from air pollution. Alas, our childhood asthma rates in the Valley top 99% of America and our air pollution causes over 1,000 premature deaths every year here. The monetary effect on our local economy is consistently ignored. The direct health care costs and indirect costs such as lost work and lost school days are calculated to be between \$1 and \$3 billion every year. Ironically, the land of plenty also has the state's worst food insecurity. Rampant unemployment and drought are threatening to undo our very way of life.

But change is possible and happening. California is on a fast-track to revolutionize its energy system and reduce fossil fuel use. In the next 15 years, we will transform the way we make and use energy with cleaner power, efficiency measures and bioenergy solutions. The San Joaquin Valley can, should, and must play a central role in that transformation and reap the benefits a clean-energy economy brings to a region and its people.

By 2020, the clean-energy sector will exceed the economic engine of the state's agricultural industry. California's clean-energy industry will more than triple from 2012 to 2020, when it will account for more than 5% of the state economy, according to the California Air Resources Board Research Division. But right now, nearly two-thirds of California's advanced energy employment is in Southern California and the Bay Area. How can the Valley be integrated into that burgeoning clean-energy economy?

Other regions profited when California focused policies and programs on their clean-energy potential: We captured the wind in Tehachapi, installed more solar than any other state, and we rank second in the nation in installed energy-efficiency measures. California virtually transformed the auto industry pushing better mileage and lower emissions. Today, more electric vehicles are sold here than anywhere else, and clean cars are a normal part of the transportation vernacular the world over.

Billions of investments flowed into California through these efforts, bringing jobs, high-tech industry and tax revenues to local and state coffers. But not enough programs and investments focused on the Valley. The region is rich in human and natural resources that must be put into play. Building and operating bioenergy plants, fuel cells, energy storage, conservation measures and other clean energies put thousands of blue-collar and white-collar professionals to work, and save consumers money. More can happen in the Valley if we focus attention and investments in the region.

On Wednesday, Aug. 12, at Fresno State, "Unlocking Renewables: A Valley Summit" will bring together state and local agencies, utilities, local businesses, residents, environmental groups, educational institutions, and clean-energy developers to try and answer the question of how the Valley can join California's clean-energy economy. The summit will engage stakeholders on ways to increase renewable energy in the Valley, while protecting prime farmland and

the environment. Participants will explore what programs and targeted investments could bring local air benefits and improve the social and environmental justice situation in the region.

Embracing the clean-energy revolution will benefit the economy and health of the Valley. The Legislature directed that as well as lowering greenhouse gas emissions, a portion of cap and trade revenues must be spent in and to the benefit of disadvantaged communities that, for example, suffer cumulative pollution impacts, have low education rates and high unemployment.

That description unfortunately does fit much of our great San Joaquin Valley. Valley residents, businesses, educational institutions, and community organizations have an opportunity we must take advantage of. On Wednesday and in the coming months you have an opportunity to improve life in our Valley. We ask you to join the dialogue.

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