

Planada, Merced



HILLCREST DAIRY & THE GROWTH OF MASSIVE DAIRIES AND FACTORY FARM GAS INFRASTRUCTURE

PLANADA, MERCED

The unincorporated community of Planada in Merced is over 100 years old. It was conceived of as a central point for business interests and tourists alike with rich agricultural land roads and railroads leading to all parts of California. William Jennings Bryan stopped at the Planada train depot on a whistlestop tour during the 1912 presidential election. Planada may now also be known for massive flooding that is occurring during the writing of this document.

Between four and five thousand people live in Planada. There is an elementary school, a middle school, a public water system, and several small businesses, parks, and community organizations. Planada is economically disadvantaged. According to CalEnviroScreen, approximately 98% of Planada's population is Latino/a/e, and the community ranks in the 83rd percentile for asthma, 97th percentile for linguistic isolation, and 88th in poverty.

HILLCREST DAIRY

The dairy was sited and opened in the community in 2002. It is about a mile away from the center of town and within a half mile of farmworker housing, where residents are majority immigrant Latino/a/e families. The dairy expanded to 8,050 cows between 2002 and 2005 and subsequently sought a permit for the already complete expansion from Merced County in 2008. **Now, the dairy is seeking a permit from Merced County to expand the herd to 9,750 cows.**

Hillcrest already has a significant impact on community well-being through air pollution, groundwater contamination, groundwater use, and flies. The dairy uses massive groundwater resources while Planada's municipal water system – entirely dependent on groundwater – is operating at capacity and there is a moratorium on new home construction. The tens of thousands of tons of manure generated annually by the dairy contaminates local domestic wells with nitrates. Odors from the dairy make being outside at times unbearable. Residents have a long, recorded history of making odor complaints which have gone unaddressed. Flies and other insects are yet another nuisance that impacts quality of life in Planada.

The proposed expansion, if approved, would intensify all of these impacts. The expansion would increase groundwater extraction for the herd's *drinking water alone* by 13.4 million gallons, or approximately 41 acre feet, annually, further exacerbating water availability concerns in the community. The expansion would likely generate over 45,000 tons of additional manure and is projected to increase manure exports off the farm from 19,998 to 33,198 tons. According to the draft environmental report there is no clear plan for these exports, nor for manure management overall. The increase in manure exports would generate thousands of additional diesel truck trips in the community in addition to the impacts to groundwater.

PLANADA AND HILLCREST IN THE CONTEXT OF MERCED'S GROWING FACTORY FARM GAS INDUSTRY

Over the course of the past several years, Merced County has approved permits for two factory farm gas pipelines – one cutting through Stanislaus County into Merced County, and another cutting through Merced County into Madera County. There are also two factory farm gas clusters in the County. All of this factory farm gas infrastructure has been supported through over \$100 million and counting in state funding through the CEC, CPUC, and CDFA. Hillcrest's owner is considering installing a digester and connecting to the network of factory farm gas infrastructure. It is in the context of this development and expansion of factory farm gas infrastructure that many dairies are expanding in and around Merced. In addition to Hillcrest, **about 9 other dairies in Merced County are expanding or seeking to expand – some to more than double in size.**