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OPINION | REVIEW & OUTLOOK

California's Cow Police

Progressives find a new climate-change villain to regulate.



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Aug. 12, 2016 7:00 p.m. ET

First they came after the oil producers, then manufacturers, and now they're coming for the cows. Having mandated emissions reductions from fossil fuels, California's relentless progressives are seeking to curb the natural gas emanating from dairy farms.

The California Air Resources Board has pumped out regulations to cut the state's greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, and the board worries that its climate agenda could be jeopardized by natural phenomena. To wit, cow manure and "enteric fermentation" (flatulence), which account for half of the state's methane emissions. According to the board, methane is a "short-lived climate pollutant" with "an outsized impact on climate change in the near term." Democratic lawmakers want to mandate a 40% reduction in methane by 2030, and the board is pondering ways to do it.

"If dairy farms in California were to manage manure in a way to further reduce methane emissions," the board explains, "a gallon of California milk might be the least GHG

intensive in the world.” And the most expensive. Many California dairy farms have already been converted into nut farms, which are more economical amid the state’s high regulatory costs.

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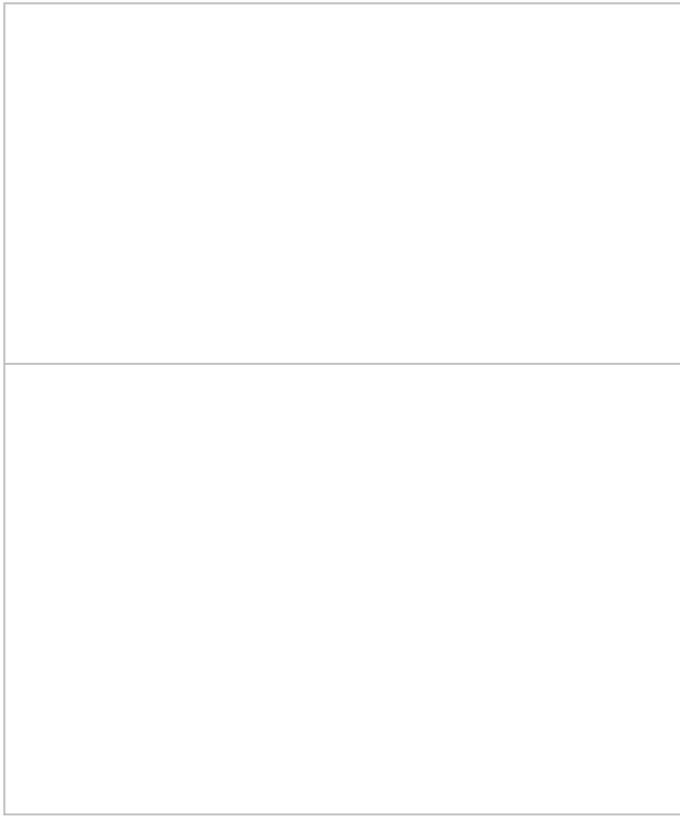
The board suggests that dairy farms purchase

technology to capture methane and then sell the biogas to consumers. Yet the regulators acknowledge that most ideas involve environmental trade-offs and are not cost-effective without substantial government subsidies and regulatory credits that can be sold to fossil-fuel producers.

For instance, “solid-scrape manure management may lead to air quality challenges.” Pasture management systems, which organic milk producers use, can eliminate methane emissions from anaerobic decomposition of manure. But if implemented on large farms, such systems may raise “animal welfare concerns due to heat exposure.” Pasture production would also yield “higher enteric fermentation emissions per unit of milk.” Apparently, organic milk isn’t so sustainable after all.

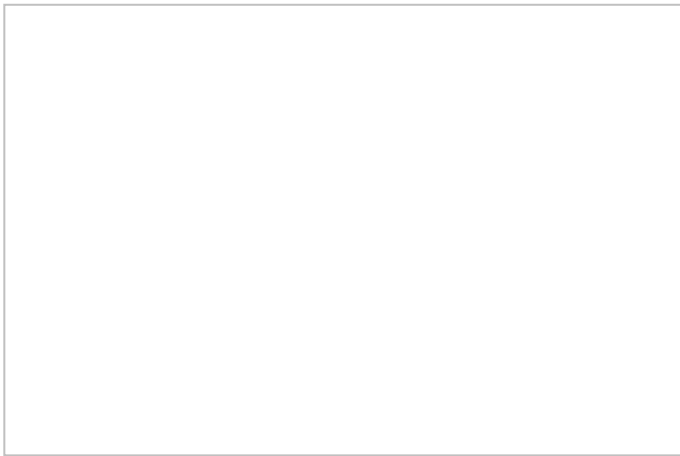
Other brainstormers include breeding animals that belch less and testing “gut microbial interventions”—though no doubt Democrats will want to see if the anti-genetic-modification activists object. This all may be too much information for readers, but it shows that in their attempt to impose their climate religion there is no corner of the economy or life that progressives won’t try to control.

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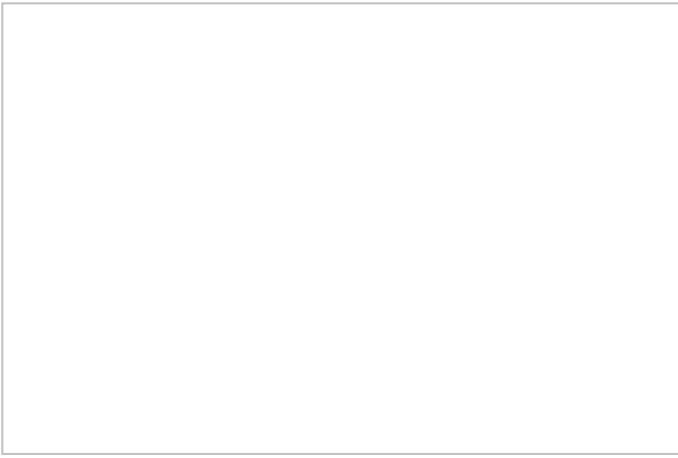
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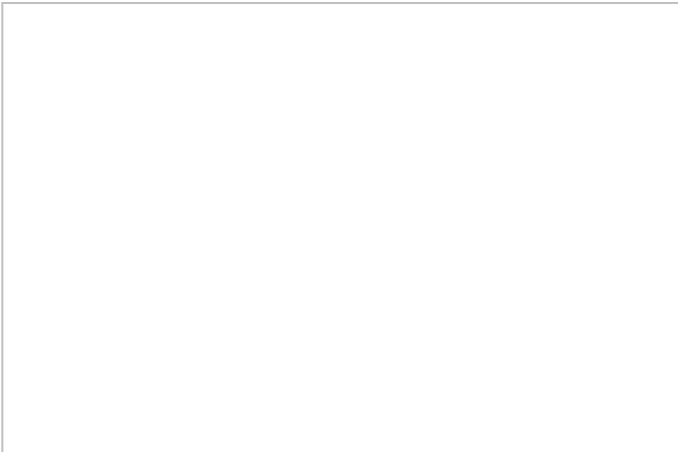


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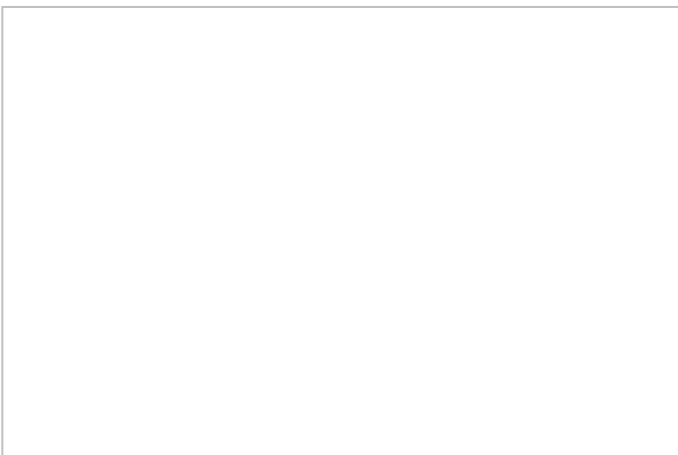


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