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Pima County board has veto power over Monsanto's tax breaks

By Tony Davis Arizona Daily Star Jan 28, 2017 Updated Jan 31, 2017



Courtesy of Monsanto

This artist's rendering shows Monsanto's planned Avra Valley greenhouse, which would develop new corn seeds.

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To the surprise of at least two Pima County supervisors, their board has veto power over whether Monsanto Co.'s greenhouse will get tax breaks from a proposed foreign trade zone designation.

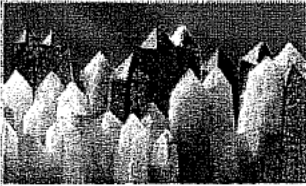
For Monsanto to get the property tax breaks, it needs the federal government to designate its 155-acre, Avra Valley-area greenhouse site as part of a larger foreign trade zone in Pima County. For that to happen, all government agencies with taxing authority affected by the designation must send letters saying



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they don't object, said Tim Truman, a spokesman for the International Trade Association, a division of the U.S. Commerce Department.

If Monsanto obtains an FTZ designation, Pima County could lose property tax revenue because the designation would reduce the company's property tax burden by two-thirds. So far, two other entities that could be impacted by the Monsanto project, the Marana Unified School District and the Joint Technical Education District (JTED), have agreed to send in letters of non-objection. A fourth entity, Pima Community College, hasn't.



What you should know about the Tucson Gem Shows

Pima County supervisors are scheduled to vote on Feb. 21, after delaying a decision last November.

Truman's statement was much firmer than one made Jan. 18 by a county official at a Monsanto public meeting. Patrick Cavanaugh, Pima County's deputy economic director, at the time described the importance of the supervisors' upcoming vote as "a great unknown."



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The need for letters of no objection is spelled out in a November 2016 document that Truman emailed to the Star last week. It says an FTZ applicant must submit copies of letters from "all affected parties" indicating that they support or don't object to the proposal. The document is labeled "guidance," a term that typically carries no force of law. But it also says the letters are required.

The document does offer a potential "out" for Monsanto. If the company agrees to pay taxing entities enough so they don't lose money from the FTZ designation, they won't need to send letters of no objection. Such an agreement is known as a PILOT, for payment in lieu of taxes.

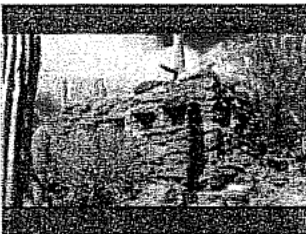


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So far, however, that waiver applies to only one of the four entities. JTED has approved a PILOT agreement to get as much money from Monsanto as it would have without the tax break.

The Marana school district has accepted a \$500,000 donation from Monsanto, far less than its take under a PILOT agreement.

Monsanto spokeswoman Charly Lord said the company intends to enter an agreement with Pima Community College to not receive any tax benefits from the college.



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County Administrator Chuck Huckelberry has proposed a PILOT agreement with Monsanto in which, for 10 years, the company would pay the difference between the taxes the county would have received without Monsanto's FTZ tax break.

But the county would have to refund the difference if Monsanto met certain goals.



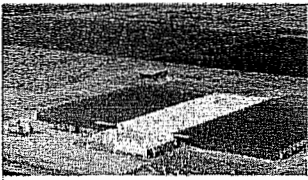
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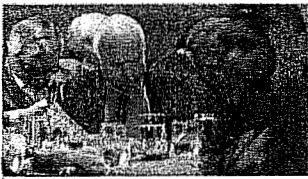
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These include at least \$90 million total investment, at least 50 full-time and part-time jobs, average annual wages of at least \$44,000, employee health and dental insurance coverage and 401(k) plans. Because the refunds will take tax revenue from the county, it would still have to send the no objection letter.

Two Pima County supervisors said they were unaware that the county's letter is legally required for Monsanto to get the designation. This requirement puts additional pressure on supervisors before deciding, said Supervisor Richard Elías, a Democrat who opposes the tax breaks for Monsanto, and Supervisor Steve Christy, a Republican who hasn't taken a stand.

"If the FTZ designation is going to be determined positively or negatively by the Pima County board, it places much more importance or emphasis on the decision the board makes," Christy said.

Until now, he added, "My feeling was that it was just rudimentary approval or disapproval and had no bearing on the status of Monsanto."

Now, the board's action "becomes more than a piece of the puzzle. It could have real impact," Elías said.

Denial of the FTZ designation wouldn't stop the greenhouse project, particularly since Monsanto already bought the land. The county lacks authority to do that. Monsanto spokeswoman Lord declined to say if the company would kill or reassess its plans for the greenhouse if the supervisors vote not to send a no-objection letter.

"We're going to use the information we've gathered from these public listening sessions, what we've learned from farming groups in the area, input we've received from business leaders and the Chamber of Commerce along with what the board decides next month to make our final decision," Lord said.

Cavanaugh, the county economic official, gave a more uncertain view of supervisors' potential impact at the Jan. 18 public meeting.

He told the gathering the impact of an unfavorable supervisors' vote was unknown, because the county has received only "guidance" from the feds and "no firm rules that we've been able to locate."

Cavanaugh later said he made the comment because the November 2016 federal guidance doesn't specify that an FTZ application would be rejected if all impacted taxing entities fail to send in the letters.

Although the document says the letters are required, "generally in regulations you have very specific direction as to what the outcome is," he said. The document also doesn't say what

happens if two entities provide letters and two don't, he said.

But when asked by the Star what would happen if one or more entities refused to send such letters, trade association spokesman Truman reaffirmed his earlier statement. He said the FTZ board, a federal entity that decides on such designations, "only processes applications that include letters of non-objection from all affected taxing entities."

On Tuesday, Cavanaugh said he's no longer unsure of what would happen if all four entities didn't sign PILOT agreements or send in no-objection letters.

On that day, he had Deputy County Attorney Regina Nassen call Andrew McGilvray, executive director of the FTZ board in Washington, D.C. He learned that if some affected parties submit letters or PILOT agreements and others don't, "The FTZ staff would not move the application forward for consideration at all," Cavanaugh said.

On Wednesday, Huckelberry issued a memo saying the same thing: That if all affected entities don't submit letters of no objection, "no property tax savings or FTZ benefit would be issued to the applicant."

Contact reporter Tony Davis at tdavis@tucson.com or 806-7746. On Twitter@tonydavis987

Tony Davis

Ron Paul's Gold Warning

Short interview with 22-year Congressman, Ron Paul, has many on edge. See his warning.

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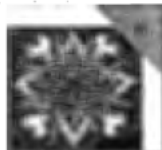
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Monsanto's Roundup® Barred From Supervisors Meeting But Okay For High Schoolers



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BY: ADI NEWS SERVICES FEBRUARY 1, 2017

Roundup®, the world's most used and most controversial herbicide, will not be allowed in the Board of Supervisor's meeting room. Pima County policy prohibits "weapons" including "items which are not designed for use as weapons but which may be used in a harmful manner" from numerous areas. "Personal-sized chemical deterrents which are carried for personal protection" are allowed, along with "pocket knives with blades less than three inches."

Albert Lannon from the Avra Valley Coalition had asked Huckelberry for permission to bring a sealed container of Roundup® to use as a visual aid while addressing the BOS during the Call to the Public. Ignoring the initial request, Huckelberry's response to a second request was brief:

After consulting with our Security staff you will not be allowed to bring this into the Board hearing room.

The implication is clear: Roundup®, with its active ingredient glyphosate, is too dangerous to be near the Board of Supervisors, but it's okay to use a mile from a high school, and even closer to other residents of the Avra Valley. There are ongoing disputes with Saguaro National Park and Tucson Water over aerial spraying of glyphosate which has sickened Avra Valley residents and their pets, and killed a rancher's cattle forage.

There is high public interest in the Pima County Board of Supervisors February 21 vote whether or not to support Monsanto's request for Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) status for a planned Avra Valley GMO corn seed factory. When the issue was brought to the BOS by the County Administrator November 22 after months of secret meetings, more than 50 people spoke in opposition. The Supervisors postponed the vote to February 21 and ordered five public meetings and the convening of a Science Advisory Committee. FTZ status would cut Monsanto's property taxes by two-thirds.

According to emails obtained by the Arizona Daily Independent, Huckelberry told Star reporter Tony Davis last October that the secrecy was not to thwart expected opposition by Supervisor Ally Miller. He did not, however, explain why he thought it was necessary. Emails also show collusion between Sun Corridor Inc. (formerly TREO), Huckelberry, County Communications Director Mark Evans, and Supervisor Sharon Bronson in creating attacks on Bronson's opponent in the 2016



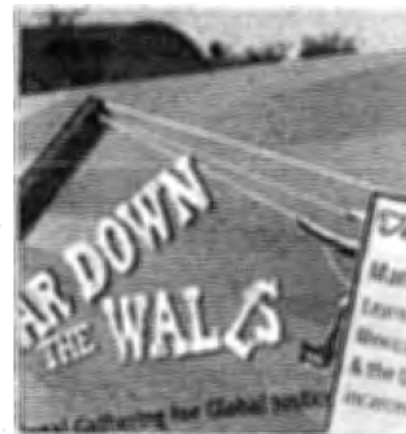
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FEBRUARY 6, 2017

Arizona

election, Kim DeMarco. County staff are barred by law from trying to influence elections. Sun Corridor Inc., a public-private economic development organization, just received over one-half-million dollars from the BOS. Bronson serves on its Chairman's Circle.

Speakers at the packed Monsanto meetings in January were overwhelmingly against both the big tax break FTZ status would bring the agri-chemical giant and the idea of locating a seven-acre greenhouse near Marana High School. Marana Town Council Member Herb Kai sold 155 acres to the corporation. At first Monsanto spokespeople said there would be "moderate" use of herbicides and pesticides, but changed their position several meetings later to "not much, if any" in the face of an outraged public.

Glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup®, has just been labeled a cause of cancer in California, and a "probable carcinogen" by the World Health Organization. Many countries and localities have banned or heavily restricted the use of glyphosate and its additives. GMO crops are engineered to resist glyphosate so that the herbicide kills only non-crop plants. The result has been increased resistance to the poison by unwanted plants, and the widespread killing of the food of the monarch butterfly caterpillar. Monsanto's traveling Ph.D. Amanda McClerran, at the District 3 public meeting, offered to create a monarch butterfly sanctuary in exchange for FTZ support.

Glyphosate, a vital ingredient in a GMO factory such as the one planned for the Avra Valley, is linked to non-Hodgkins lymphoma, fatty liver disease, autism and other diseases. Health professional Janay Young, whose father used to farm the land sold to Monsanto, is the mother of two Marana High School students. She and other parents have been telling local officials about nearly 12,000 studies in the last four years linking glyphosate to birth defects and miscarriages,

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