

Table grape crop second largest ever

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

Table grape growers in California’s San Joaquin Valley have wrapped up the harvest of what will likely be their second largest crop in history despite drought-related water shutoffs that forced many of them to rely on wells.

Producers were on track to meet a mid-harvest estimate of 105.9 million 19-pound boxes — short of last year’s record 116.3 million-box haul but ahead of the 101.3 million containers turned out in 2012, said Kathleen Nave, president of the Fresno-based California Table Grape Commission.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press
Grapes fill a bin at a farmers' market in Davis, Calif. Table grape growers in California have likely turned out their second largest crop in history despite having been impacted by the drought.

“We are still shipping from California, and expect to be shipping into the middle of January,” Nave said. “It was an early season. ... Prices have been very good. Overall quality has been very good and of course prices typically reflect

that. Prices were particularly strong in the fall.”

The higher prices for most varieties helped producers make up for the drop in yield, said Sean Stockton, president of Sundale Sales in Tulare, Calif.

“As a whole, the overall average price was a little higher than last year, which makes economic sense — with yields being down, the prices would be higher,” Stockton said. “The biggest thing that concerns California farmers right now is water, and the increased price of labor. ... Table grapes are one of the most expensive crops to grow.”

Many growers were affect-

ed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation’s shutoff of irrigation water from the Central Valley Project and had to rely on lower-quality well water, which affected yields, Stockton said.

“When you lose a 16th ... on berry size, you lose quite a bit of production,” he said. “That’s probably pretty consistent with what the industry saw this year.”

The picking of grapes for the fresh market typically begins in late June and continues into December, with shipments proceeding through January. The harvest typically starts in the Coachella Valley and then gets going in the San Joaquin Valley, where the bulk

of the state’s table grapes are grown.

Fresh-market grape production is but a small portion of the overall grape crop. The USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service office in Sacramento expected raisin-type grape growers to end up with a seasonal crop of 1.95 million tons, down 13 percent from last year. Winegrape production — which represents 55 percent of grapes grown in California — was forecast at 3.9 million tons, down 8 percent from 2013.

In addition to the drought, hail during the bloom negatively affected some vineyards, NASS reported.

Several Wash. crops see gains

KENNEWICK, Wash. (AP) — The state’s top agricultural commodities — including apples, milk and wheat — were worth \$4.5 billion to farmers, according to a recently released federal report.

Several of the state’s most valuable crops saw gains in the U. S. Department of Agriculture review, and wine production became a larger player the industry, the Tri-City Herald reported.

Apples, the state’s most valuable crop, were worth nearly 12 percent less in 2013 because of a record crop and higher prices the previous year.

Bud Hover, director of the state Department of Agriculture, said apples may have peaked again in 2014. Farmers picked a record 150 million 40-pound boxes of apples last year and started exporting Red and Golden Delicious apples to China.

Starting this month, China is expected to accept all Washington apple varieties.

The future of the wine industry also appears bright, Hover said.

Washington wines are performing well in competitions, and there is a growing demand for the state’s wine, including



Dan Wheat/Capital Press
Gala apples pass through the last human defect sorting prior to optical sorting, sizing and grading at Zirkle Fruit Co., in Yakima, Wash., on Oct. 8. Apples were Washington's most valuable crop in 2013, according to state statistics.

exports. “We grow such high quality fruit for wine making,” he said.

The state’s wine grapes have seen steady increases in recent years, and the 2013 crop value grew more than 19 percent to \$233.1 million.

The state’s wine industry is expected to continue to grow because growers have added and expanded vineyards, and

it takes several years for new vines to mature and produce a full crop.

The state’s blueberries hit records in acreage and yield during 2013. However, the value of blueberries dropped to about \$71.6 million, according to the data. That’s a 16 percent cut from the previous year. Washington farmers picked about 9,000 acres of blueber-

ries in 2013. In all, about 81.6 million pounds of blueberries were harvested.

Hops also have become more prominent with the rise of microbreweries, which tend to use more hops for brewing. Hover said he expected that demand to continue to climb. Hops were worth \$184.9 million in 2013, a 28 percent jump from the previous year.

NW Horticultural Council hires staff

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — A former congressional aide is becoming a vice president of the Northwest Horticultural Council in Yakima and may become a key leader in its future.

Kate Woods, 30, became an intern for Washington’s 4th District Congressman, Doc Hastings, in 2003, and joined his staff full time in 2005. She has been his legislative director since 2011.

With Hastings’ retirement from Congress, Woods joins NHC on Jan. 7. She likely will work on some international trade duties, food safety and media relations, said Chris Schlect, NHC president.

“The thinking is she will be a key leader in the years ahead,” Schlect said.

Schlect, 63, said he’s planning to retire in June 2017, at which time Mark Powers, executive vice president, probably will become president.

Powers, who has focused on international trade, will now shift more toward domestic issues including labor that have been Schlect’s domain.

“Our board wants to see



continuity when anyone on our staff leaves, including me,” Schlect said. “Our industry is too big and important to not have expertise. I think we’re well on our way to doing that with our two new hires.”

Drew Toop, 25, became the council’s regulatory information specialist, Dec. 8. He reviews U.S. and international data on technical standards relating to agricultural goods, looking for developments that relate to apples, pears and cherries.

Toop was born and raised in Yakima. He graduated from Washington State University in 2011 with degrees in English and Chinese Language and Culture. He studied at Harbin Institute of Technology in Northeast China before graduating from WSU and attended National Taiwan University afterward. He lived in Taiwan for 2 1/2 years and taught English.

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