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Stock dogs deal with stiff competition at Red Bluff sale

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

RED BLUFF, Calif. — Edgar Ortega picked a high-caliber venue to test his skill as a stock dog breeder.

The Fort Klamath, Ore., resident entered his border collie, BC Buck, in the Red Bluff Bull and Gelding Sale, where three days of competitions preceded a sale of 16 dogs.

His dog sold for \$2,900 to L9 Livestock in Modesto, Calif.

"I wanted to bring him here and try him out, try my luck," Ortega said. "This is my first dog that I've trained up to this level. ... I would consider this to be probably one of the best sales here on the West Coast."

Buck was up against stiff competition at the 37th annual dog sale Jan. 30 at the Tehama District Fair grounds. The top dog, Klamath Falls, Ore., breeder Jaime Gonzalez's PR Canelo, sold for \$13,000. The average sale price was nearly \$5,219.

In an era when dog competitions are becoming a popular tool for breeders to improve the quality of their kennels, the Red Bluff event has gained a reputation as one of the best and toughest, entrants say.

The sale limits its entries to 20 each year, and the dogs face three graded workouts — two outdoors and one indoors — at which they must show their ability to herd cattle. They can be sifted at any time, and they must perform in front of large crowds; about 5,000 people watched the freestyle final just before the sale.

"People love to watch the dogs," said Ron Anderson, a bull sale committee member. "Anybody can buy a dog. You can buy it for ranch work, for cattle work, or just for a pet."

Ranchers who breed and sell working cow dogs have been embracing the growing popularity of stock dog competitions for several years. The meets can help a rancher compare the quality of his or her dogs to others, and increased participation in trials has led to an overall upgrade in the quality of dogs that are available, breeders have said.

Hank Pritchard of Manton, Calif., has been bringing dogs to the Red Bluff sale since the late 1980s, he said. He's noticed a steady rise in prices paid for dogs.

"I got \$4,700 one time, for the high-selling dog in '91," Pritchard said. "Now that's about the average."

A good dog can fetch as much as \$15,000 in a sale, breeders have said, and a litter of pups can bring a good



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

A rancher works her dog during outside trials Jan. 30 at the Red Bluff Bull and Gelding Sale. As many as 20 dogs go through a series of trials each year before they're sold.

return on investment. At Red Bluff, the record price for a dog was more than \$20,000 several years ago, Anderson said.

Like Ortega, Paige Winebarger of Paulina, Ore., was a first-year entrant at this year's Red Bluff sale. After scoring high in three days of competitions, her dog Lazy D Toad sold for \$8,000 — second only to Gonzalez's entry.

"My son's been coming

here for several years," said her husband, Kirk Winebarger. "He got the champion dog several times, and the high-selling dog."

While its performance in the competition usually affects a dog's sale price, it doesn't always. Ortega said he's seen dogs that scored low in trials still fetch a decent return.

"It just depends on what everybody likes," he said.

Pistachio growers fret over warm nights, dry conditions

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

Pistachio growers in California's San Joaquin Valley are worried about a repeat of last year, when the drought and a lack of winter chill hours diminished the size of their crop.

The recently concluded pistachio harvest yielded 519 million pounds, which eclipsed the 475 million pounds produced in 2013 but fell short of expectations that approached 600 million pounds, said Richard Matoian, executive director of the Fresno-based American Pistachio Growers.

The shortfall came as many areas in the valley, which is home to nearly all of the nation's pistachio acres, failed to achieve the net 800 hours of chill that the trees need, Matoian said. Some areas that did get the chill hours also recorded high daytime temperatures, which offset the nighttime cold, he said.

The lack of chill hours led to an uneven bloom, he said.

"The second thing that happened was the drought and a lack of water," Matoian said. "With those two factors, what



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Frank Tamayo sells pistachios for Fiddymont Farms in Lincoln, Calif., at a recent farmers' market in Davis, Calif. A second straight winter of dry conditions and a lack of chill hours in California's San Joaquin Valley has pistachio growers worried about their crop.

promised to be a large crop kept shrinking throughout the year. We had estimates that were ... as low as 425 million pounds."

This winter, valley communities have again experienced many nights that didn't get cold enough to benefit the trees, he said. And with January having been one of the driest months on record, the drought shows no signs of end-

ing soon.

As last year should have been an "on" year for the alternate-bearing crop, the fact that it didn't meet expectations may portend some promise this year, Matoian said. But that promise could be offset by a lack of water availability, he said.

"I've seen all kinds of predictions out there — predictions as low as 450 million pounds and as high as 650 million pounds" for 2015, he said.

Exports of U.S. pistachios have been increasing consistently over the past five years, as burgeoning global demand has depleted U.S. stockpiles from just under 50,000 metric tons last year to an expected 28,532 at the end of 2014, according to the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service.

California growers weren't alone last year in turning out a light crop. The USDA expected global production to be off about 20 percent from 2013 as key competitors Iran and Turkey were in the off year of the alternate-bearing crop cycle, although Iran ended up with a larger crop than anticipated, Matoian said.

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Californians cut water use by 22 percent

By **FENIT NIRAPPIL**
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — State officials reported Tuesday that residents in drought-stricken California met Gov. Jerry Brown's call to slash water use by 20 percent for the first time in December, when water use fell by 22 percent compared to the same month in 2013.

But officials at the State Water Resources Control Board cautioned that state residents may have been aided by a rainy month in December, which minimized the need to water lawns.

"It reinforces what we thought all along, that the extent of outdoor water use is a huge driver of water conservation and water use," board Chairwoman Felicia Marcus said.

Brown called on residents to cut water use by 20 percent when he declared a drought emergency last year. The closest Californians previously came to reaching that goal was in August, when water use dropped 11.6 percent compared with the previous year, according to the monthly surveys of water suppliers.



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