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California

By TIM HEARDEN Capital Press

MODESTO, Calif. — Continued stress on trees because of the ongoing drought will lead to a slightly smaller almond crop this year, industry insiders predict.

The Almond Board of California expects this year's harvest to produce 1.8 billion meat pounds, or about 3 percent less than a federal forecast of 1.85 billion pounds in May and down 3.3 percent from last year's production of 1.867 billion pounds.

The board expects nuts to be harvested from 890,000 bearing acres statewide, up slightly from the historic high of 880,000 bearing acres forecast by the National Agricultural Statistics Service last year.

This year's estimate reflects the continued stress that growers are coping with as a result of the drought, which is now in its fourth year, said Mike Mason, an almond grower and processor who chairs the almond board.

"The California agriculture community is certainly hoping that the drought abates next winter, but in the meantime, growers are doing everything within their power to conserve water," he said as the board unveiled its crop estimate on July 1.

The average nut set per tree is 5,874, down 12 percent from the 2014 crop, the board reported. The Nonpareil average nut set is 5,239, down 14 percent from last year, while the average kernel weight for all varieties sampled was 1.43 grams, down 1 percent from the 2014 average weight of 1.45 grams.

In May, NASS forecast the bearing acreage for 2015 at 290,000 acres, resulting in a yield of 2,080 pounds per acre. The expanding acreage comes despite some growers' decision



Almonds are processed at a packaging plant. This year's almond crop is expected to be slightly smaller than last year's, mainly because of drought-related tree stress.

to take some older orchards out because of a lack of water, but others are putting in new or-

chards because the returns for almonds are lucrative enough that growers can afford to purchase water for them, industry professionals have said. Last year's harvest fell well short of the NASS prediction of a 2.1 billion pound crop as growers encountered smaller kernels and more rejects than normal because of the drought. The agency believed a net gain of 20,000 bearing acres last year would fuel an increase from the 2 billion meat pounds turned out in 2013.

However, a few orchards didn't turn a crop last year because of a lack of water, and near-daily 100-degree heat for a stretch last summer further impacted the crop.

This year, nuts were apparently sizing well with crop development about two weeks ahead of normal, NASS reported. But triple-digit temperatures are back this summer; some Central Valley communities saw their afternoon highs average above 98 degrees in June, according to the National Weather Service.

Heat wave accelerates crops, stresses scarce water resources

By TIM HEARDEN Capital Press

RED BLUFF, Calif. — A heat wave that's causing crops to develop quickly and putting more pressure on scarce water resources could last through the summer, forecasters say.

California's Central Valley and the rest of the West are likely to experience higher-than-normal temperatures over the next three months, according to the federal Climate Prediction Center.

The outlook comes as Red Bluff and other cities have already experienced two weeks of near daily triple-digit highs leading up to the July Fourth weekend, with temperatures here spiking at 113 degrees on June 30.

For many growers, rising temperatures mean having to use more water to irrigate, said Kevin Greer, who operates a mobile irrigation van for the Tehama County Resource Conservation District.

"It changes the irrigation schedule," said Greer, who counsels growers on how to make the most of their water. "The hotter it gets, the more water they have to put on."

In the Red Bluff area, most growers have nut or prune orchards or pasture land and rely on groundwater to sustain them, Greer said.

"The shallower wells are where some of the growers are having a little bit of trouble," he said, adding that one grower had to deepen his well from 85 to 200 feet. "I'm finding a lot of guys are having to call in well drillers and increase the depth of their wells dramatically."

At R and K Orchards in Corning, Calif., the heat has caused the peaches, apricots and other fruit to ripen quick-

ly, co-owner Karen Mills said.

"The heat will cause anything that's close to ripe to drop," she said.

If it gets hot enough, peaches will cook on the tree, Mills said.

"That's only happened to us once," she said, adding that the fruit had to be discarded.

Some varieties of peaches, nectarines, plums and apricots are two to three weeks ahead of schedule, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service in Sacramento. The heat has caused Valencia oranges to re-green, prompting growers to treat them and divert them to domestic markets, the agency reports.

The heat is expected to continue through the summer and possibly into October, said Cindy Matthews, a National Weather Service hydrologist in Sacramento.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

A field near Willows, Calif., is prepared for rice planting this spring. Rice acreage in California is down considerably this summer because of a lack of available water.

California's field crop acreages continue to shrink amid drought

By TIM HEARDEN Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — A continued lack of water availability is causing field crop acreages in California to dip even lower than expected, government and industry representatives say.

Rice acreage in California is now expected to top out at 385,000, a steep drop from the 431,000 acres of rice harvested last year, according to a USDA

Online

NASS crop acreage report: http://www.usda.gov/nass/ PUBS/TODAYRPT/acrg0615. pdf

California to decrease by 11 percent and 9 percent, respectively, from 2014, its updated field crop report states.

Nationwide, areas planted to rice in 2015 are estimated at 2.77 million areas down 6 par

to settlement contractors along the river.

"There's kind of a worry that it'll decrease their diversions," Mathews said.

Rice is one of several field crops in California showing sharp acreage declines this year, according to the report. Among others:

Corn acreage in the Golden State is estimated at 430,000 acres, down from 520,000 acres a year ago. Corn planted nation-wide totals 88.9 million acres, down 2 percent from last year.
California's 51,000 acres of cotton are down from the 56,000 acres harvested in the state last year.





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The actual acreage may end up being lower, cautions Charley Mathews, a Marysville, Calif., grower and member of the USA Rice Federation's executive committee.

"The industry number we've been using is between 350,000 and 375,000," Mathews said. "I think they (the USDA) started off kind of high."

Early this spring, farmers told the National Agricultural Statistics Service they intended to seed rice on 408,000 acres, or 6 percent below the acreage seeded in 2014. However, NASS now expects mediumand short-grain rice acreage in 2.77 million acres, down 6 percent from last year, because of lower price expectations this year, according to NASS.

Water uncertainties amid a fourth straight year of drought have continued to fluster growers, particularly along the Sacramento River in Northern California. With regulators wanting to keep enough water in the river for migrating fish, many growers had to wait for deliveries before they could start planting in late April.

Recently, the federal government's need to keep cold water in Shasta Lake for fish has further complicated the timing and quantity of remaining deliveries • Growers have planted 35,000 acres of sunflower in California this year, down from 44,000 acres last year.

The declines come as growers with limited water have sacrificed some annual plantings to concentrate on perennial crops, such as nut orchards, they have said.

For the area survey, NASS officials visited randomly selected tracts of land and interviewed growers in early June, according to a news release.

