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# California

## Fresh, processing tomato crops good for growers with water

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

REDDING, Calif. — Fresh-market tomato growers in Northern California say this summer's conditions have been ripe for a good crop for those who have enough water.

"Everything's ripened early, but it's been a good crop with good flavor," said Aldon Burlison, owner of Burlison's Fruit Stand in Dairyville, Calif.

He added the occasional triple-digit heat has quickened the development of his tomatoes but hasn't damaged the crop.

"When it cools off, they slow down," Burlison said. "It's been kind of hit and miss. It gets hot and then it gets cool again."

For Orland, Calif., produce farmer Ed Hughes, the season has been a little rough because the water he draws from his wells is getting scarcer, he said.

"We've actually cut back on the types of things I grow," Hughes said during a farmers' market in Redding on Aug. 8.

But the season has been agreeable for Tom Reemts, owner of Tom's Produce south of Redding.

"It's pretty good because I've been growing these under shade cloth," Reemts said of his tomatoes. "When it gets really hot, they like being in the shade."

The harvests of both fresh-market and processing tomatoes have been under way in California for a little more than a month. California leads the nation in fresh tomato tonnage and provides more than one-third of the U.S. domestic supply, although tonnage and acreage were down last year, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

About 5,087.5 tons of fresh-market tomatoes were harvested from about 32,300 acres statewide in 2014, down from 5,670 tons on 36,000 acres in 2012, according to NASS' annual vegetable report.

Meanwhile, good growing conditions so far this summer have enabled the state's processing tomato farmers to keep up with last year's record pace, the California Farm Bureau Federa-



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Pamela Spobo (right) and Jim Collins of Redding, Calif., pick out fresh tomatoes at a local farmers' market Aug. 8. Tomato growers say it's a good crop year for those who have water.

tion reports.

Tomato processors anticipate contracts for 14.3 million tons in 2015, a 2 percent increase from the final contracted production last year, NASS reported.

The projected harvested acreage of processing tomatoes is 295,000 acres, about 2 percent more than last year's final total of 289,000 productive acres, according to NASS. As with fresh-market tomatoes, much of processing tomato growers'

success will hinge on the performance of wells for those who won't have much or any surface water.

This year's \$80-per-ton contract price is second only to the 2014 price of \$83 a ton, making tomatoes a worthwhile crop for farmers who have row-crop ground and some water, the Farm Bureau noted.

Perhaps bolstering tomato crops have been breaks in the heat. In the northern Sacramen-

to Valley, temperatures reached triple digits for three different stretches in July but cooled off into the 80s in between them, according to the National Weather Service.



Lacey Jarrell/For the Capital Press

Scott Scholer, field manager of Lassen Canyon Nursery in Macdoel, Calif., points out runners that will be cut off mother plants and sold to strawberry growers across the United States.

## Nursery specializes in growing strawberry plants

By **LACEY JARRELL**  
For the Capital Press

MACDOEL, Calif. — Scott Scholer has been in the strawberry business for 23 years.

He has stayed in it so long, he says, because no two days are the same.

"Agriculture is an adventure," Scholer laughed.

This year, Scholer, the general manager of field production at Lassen Canyon Nursery in Macdoel, Calif., oversees 838 acres of strawberries. He said each year strawberry acreage on the 5,000-acre Klamath Basin farm varies based on the number of orders made by large-scale commercial fruit growers, mainly in California.

"They plant them to make berries. Our high elevation nursery is the last step to the fruit grower," Scholer said.

Strawberry plants are not grown for fruit at Lassen — they are grown for runners that are separated from mother plants, developed by specialty breeders, such as at the University of California or the University of Florida. Growing the mother plants into suitable, salable offspring is a process that takes several years and spans several locations.

"By the time these plants get

here to Macdoel, they are fourth generation," Scholer said.

Once in the ground at Lassen, the plants multiply "like crazy." He said rows spaced 3 feet apart are planted in March or April, and by harvest time in September, the plants are so dense they look like a "green carpet."

"We plant 12,000 plants per acre. We'll harvest 300,000," Scholer said. "Last year we did over 200 million plants out of Macdoel."

According to Scholer, Lassen is based in Northern California's Butte Valley because the weather cools considerably in early fall. He explained that hardy nursery plants perform best in the fruiting field if they have a lot of chill prior to harvest.

"We hope for somewhere about 250 hours of cold, which is below 45 degrees from Sept. 1 to harvest time," he said.

This year's mild winter has helped his crop get a head start, but each season brings its own surprises, Scholer said.

"Mother Nature can turn around and tease you. One of our big concerns is hail. If we were to get a big hail storm, at any time during the season, it can be very detrimental because it cuts off the runners."

## SPI mostly unscathed as wildfires rip through forest land, budgets

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

ANDERSON, Calif. — As wildfires have ripped through thousands of acres of California forest lands and depleted state and federal firefighting budgets, timber giant Sierra Pacific Industry has gone mostly unscathed.

After losing major swaths of land to fires in 2012 and 2013, SPI has lost less than 1,000 acres of its own timberland to fires raging around the state, spokesman Mark Pawlicki said.

About 550 of those acres were in the Lowell Fire, which had burned more than 2,300 acres in Nevada and Placer counties and was 95 percent contained as of Aug. 6, according to the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

With the company's lands mostly safe so far, Sierra Pacific crews have been helping Cal Fire battle nearby blazes by providing maps, opening gates, laying out the best locations for firelines and giving water locations, Pawlicki said in an email.

"Also we are building a network of fuel breaks across our ownership and trying to tie them into similar breaks on other lands," he said.

Government agencies can use the help. As of Aug. 6, wildfires had burned more than 22,000 acres in and near the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, more than 17,000 acres of the Six Rivers National Forest, nearly 5,000 acres around the Modoc National Forest and smaller portions of the Los Padres, Mendocino and Sequoia national forests, according to the U.S. Forest Service.

In all, about 10,000 firefighters are battling 23 major blazes in California, nearly one-third of



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

A California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection engine sits ready at the Shasta District Fair grounds in Anderson, Calif., which is being used as a base camp for firefighters battling blazes in Trinity County. Sierra Pacific Industry crews have been helping Cal Fire fight wildfires.

whom are assigned to the more than 100-square-mile Rocky Fire in Lake, Colusa and Yolo counties, The Associated Press reported.

For the first time, the U.S. Forest Service expects to spend more than half its budget — 52 percent — on fire suppression this year, further squeezing forest restoration, watershed and landscape management programs, according to an agency report issued Aug. 5.

In fiscal 1995, the agency only spent 16 percent of its budget on firefighting, the report explained. But within 10 years, fire expenditures could take up as much as two-thirds of the budget, the agency contends.

Meanwhile, Cal Fire estimates it has spent \$63 million battling large wildfires since July 1 — a sizable chunk of the \$434 million it spent in the entire last fiscal year, the AP reported.

For Sierra Pacific, this year so far marks a bit of a reprieve after the company lost about 17,000 acres of timberland in the 30,000-acre Ponderosa Fire in Northern California in 2012

and saw another 12,000 acres of its property burn in the 2013 Rim Fire near Yosemite National Park.

"We have been lucky so far" this summer, Pawlicki said.

A few years ago, Sierra Pacific developed a 100-point checklist of safety precautions that must be taken at each logging site, going above and beyond what state regulators require, research and monitoring manager Cajun James said earlier this year.

As part of the company's protocol, weather-station readings feed a password-protected website that logging contractors must check to know ahead of time whether conditions are too dry or windy to work, James said.

Timber can't be insured, so SPI salvages the trees left standing after a fire on its property. The bark protects the wood inside, so trees can still produce lumber even though they've been killed. Company crews also take steps to minimize soil erosion, Pawlicki has said.

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**Case IH LBX332**, 3x3 Large Sq. Baler, auto controls, reg. pickup, flotation tires..... **\$29,600** Hillsboro #636015  
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