

# Exports down but apple sales good overall

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Sale of the third-largest apple crop in Washington state history continues on pace into January with good prices holding while exports continue to decline.

The total fresh crop is now estimated at 117.1 million 40-pound boxes compared with 141.8 million from the 2014 crop and 115 million in 2013. The second largest was 128.8 million in 2012.

Season-to-date shipments total 43.6 million boxes on Jan. 10 compared with 51.9 million a year ago and 43.3 million two

years ago.

That's decent movement that shows marketers are beginning to hold back, not pushing sales as hard, said Desmond O'Rourke, retired Washington State University agricultural economist and industry observer.

The average price of all varieties remains at \$24 per box, as it was a month ago, but without Honeycrisp it would be \$21, O'Rourke said.

The overall average for Gala is \$23 per box and Red Delicious is in the \$18 to \$19 range, he said.

The average asking price on extra-fancy grade, size 88 Gala

was \$30 to \$34.90, mostly \$30 to \$32.90, per box on Jan. 11, according to USDA Market News. That was up slightly from \$30 to \$32.90 on Dec. 8 and up from \$26 to \$28.90 in November.

Extra-fancy, size 88 Red Delicious was \$16 to \$20.90, mostly \$18 to \$19.90, up from \$16 to \$18.69 on Dec. 8.

Other varieties at extra-fancy, size 88 on Jan. 11: Honeycrisp, \$80 to \$85.90; Cripps Pink, \$32 to \$36.90; Fuji, \$28 to \$30.90; Granny Smith, \$20 to \$24.90, mostly \$20 to \$22.90; Golden Delicious, \$26 to \$28.90.

Exports are down 32 per-

cent season-to-date, as of Jan. 10, compared with a year ago, O'Rourke said. A month ago they were down 28 percent.

A smaller crop and stronger dollar reducing the buying power of importers in other countries are the chief reasons, he said.

Todd Fryhover, president of the Washington Apple Commission in Wenatchee, last month said exports may end up about 20 to 15 percent of the crop this season instead of their usual 30 percent. Exports will probably total 30 million to 35 million boxes compared with 48.7 million from the 2014 crop, he has said.

As of Jan. 10, 11.7 million boxes had been exported compared with 17.2 million a year ago.

Russia remains closed to Western produce, but China is a bright spot at 679,562 boxes compared to 205,219 a year ago. China is open to all U.S. varieties, which it wasn't a year ago.

The U.S. Apple Association reported 129.3 million boxes of apples in storage on Jan. 1, down 16 percent from last January and with 90.5 million of that being fresh market and 38.8 million for processing for juice, sauce and baked ingredients.

## Water battles will come to head in 2016, experts say

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Battles over water will likely shape agriculture's legal landscape in 2016, with several high-profile lawsuits expected to come to a head over the next year, experts say.

Aside from litigation over the federal government's new "waters of the U.S." rules, which critics say will greatly increase jurisdiction over private lands, farmers in the West are also fighting federal enforcement of existing regulations.

In California, the Duarte Nursery is seeking to overturn a finding by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that switching from spring to winter wheat resulted in plowing activities that affected wetlands in violation of the Clean Water Act.

In Wyoming, farmer Andy Johnson is challenging a finding by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that construction of a stock pond unlawfully discharged pollutants into a stream without a Clean Water Act permit.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to review a case in which landowners want the right to contest a federal determination that their property is subject to Clean Water Act regulations.

The mounting legal turmoil over water is occurring for several reasons, said Jonathan Wood, an attorney with the Pacific Legal Foundation property rights non-profit, during the American Farm Bureau Federation's recent convention.

One reason is that landowners can now dispute federal "compliance orders" that require them to rectify alleged Clean Water Act violations or face steep civil penalties.

Prior to a 2012 Supreme Court ruling, landowners could not challenge such compliance orders until the EPA brought a civil action against them seeking to enforce fines. The nation's highest court, in a case known as Sackett v. EPA, found that compliance orders are government actions that can be fought in federal court, which has emboldened other landowners to challenge the agency, Wood said.

The problem is that landowners still don't have access to courts unless the EPA finds a violation, which is why the upcoming lawsuit over "jurisdictional determinations" is so important, he said.

"It takes a lot of confidence to challenge the EPA over a compliance order," Wood said.

In that upcoming Supreme Court case, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers v. Hawkes, landowners want to fight determinations that they're subject to the Clean Water Act, which are generally issued before the federal government ever imposes a compliance order.

Access to the court system when facing an adverse jurisdictional determination "means a lot if you're a landowner that's completely blindsided," Wood said.

While ordinary farm practices such as plowing and stock pond construction are supposed to be exempt from the Clean Water Act, federal agencies reinterpret these exceptions narrowly to fit their agenda, said Danielle Quist, senior counsel for public policy at AFBF.

In the case of Duarte Nursery, for example, the EPA contends that the company fell outside this exemption because plowing at the depth of a foot constitutes "deep ripping" in violation of the Clean Water Act, she said.

"If that's not plowing, then nobody is doing any plowing," Quist said.

Enforcement actions by federal agencies that farmers consider to be excessive aren't likely the result of a conspiracy, but the vagueness of the Clean Water Act, said Wood.

With the possibility of interpreting the statute broadly, government officials with environmentalist sympathies can impose their will with little fear of repercussions, he said.

## Red Bluff Bull Sale to celebrate 75th anniversary

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press

RED BLUFF, Calif. — Organizers of this year's bull and gelding sale here will kick off the week's activities Jan. 26 by throwing a 75th anniversary party.

The 5:30 p.m. gala at the State Theatre in downtown Red Bluff will include a live band, refreshments and a video presentation of the early years of the Red Bluff Bull and Gelding Sale, office secretary Marianne Brownfield said.

The gala is among several special activities celebrating the sale's milestone, which will also include added \$7,500 cash prizes for a supreme bull and the top cow horse, Brownfield said.

In all, 400 bulls, 100 geldings and 20 stock dogs are entered in the series of sales Jan. 26-30 at the Tehama District Fair grounds. The bull auction is on the final day of a packed week that will also include trade and art shows, a kickoff breakfast, beef forums and seminars and a bull riding competition.

"The art show and sale and the trade show are all full,"



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Jon England of England Ranch in Prineville, Ore., washes one of his Hereford bulls at the 2014 Red Bluff Bull and Gelding Sale. This year's bull sale will celebrate its 75th anniversary.

### Online Red Bluff Bull Sale

Brownfield said.

Amid a shortage of bulls in the west last year, bidders shelled out a record \$1.56 million for 236 bulls that passed through the Don Smith Pavilion, paying an average of

\$6,594 per bull. At the 2014 sale, 319 bulls were auctioned after no-shows and sifting whittled the field, and winning bids totaled \$1.038 million.

The 67 geldings auctioned off in 2015 generated \$639,600 in combined sales, three mules sold for a combined \$14,350 and 16 working cattle dogs brought \$83,500 in

total sales.

The sale has become one of the West's biggest livestock events. Started by local ranchers as a way to boost their sales in a post-Depression environment, the sale has evolved into a social event for families as well as a serious business trip for cattle producers.

Thousands of people come to Red Bluff each year for

the week of the sale, which features a trade show with as many as 160 businesses.

Fifth-generation rancher Adam Owens, the great-grandson of founding member Roy Owens and the grandson of former sale president Bill Owens, took over as manager before the 2010 sale and has added several new features. Among them is a Western art show that has featured more than 100 paintings, sculptures, drawings, silverwork and other forms of art competing for \$1,000 prizes in several categories.

This year's bidding will begin with the eighth annual feeder and replacement heifer sale on Jan. 28, as buyers online and in the pavilion will shop for cow lots shown on a video screen. Last year, about 80 lots were sold.

Geldings and mules will be auctioned off in an evening program Jan. 29 as consigners try to compete for added prize money, which last year totaled more than \$11,000. Working dogs will also be sold Jan. 29 after a couple of days of trial events.

## Calif. rangeland growth slow despite steady winter rains

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press

SANTA CRUZ, Calif. — Dairy producer Rebecca King is happy with all the rain that's been falling in California's Central Coast region over the last few weeks.

"It's great," she said at a recent farmers' market here. "We haven't had any pasture so we've had to buy hay, which has gone up in price."

But while recent rains have improved pastures in some parts of California, more is needed to help with the germination and development of foothill grasses and forbs, notes the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

King, owner of Garden Variety Cheese in Royal Oaks, Calif., is among most dairy and cattle producers who've had to supplementally feed livestock as range and pasture have struggled to recover after four years of drought.

Development of rangelands has been slow in many areas because rains started too late in the fall to germinate grasses, said Josh Davy, a University of



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Rebecca King (left), a dairy producer from Royal Oaks, Calif., talks with a friend, Gunther Gettelinger, at a farmers' market in Santa Cruz, Calif., in late December. King says she is hopeful that all the recent rains will improve conditions in her pastures.

California Cooperative Extension livestock adviser in Red Bluff, Calif.

"It was already cold by the time (the rain) got going," Davy said. "Once you drop below 50 degrees, it slows down a lot in production."

Winter rains do fill stock ponds, Davy said, and producers hope that the rains continue in February and March when temperatures start to warm up.

"If we can get some heavy rain, we should have a decent

year from here on out," Davy said.

The germination and winter growth of forage grasses are only the first of distinct phases of forage growth, UC researchers explain on a rangelands website. Rapid spring growth precedes peak forage production, the UC explains, so ample late-season rains are crucial to productive grazing lands.

Green grasses in the late winter to late spring are key to the adequacy of beef cattle weight gains, the UC advises.

## Northwest ag, climate change grant extended

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

MOSCOW, Idaho — Scientists from Idaho, Oregon and Washington will have an extra year to complete their work on how climate change may affect regional cereal production, following the recent extension of a collaborative USDA grant.

Researchers from University of Idaho, Washington State University, Oregon State University and USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Pullman, Wash., started work in May of 2011 on a \$20 million, five-year grant titled Regional Approaches to Climate Change for Pacific Northwest Agriculture. Rather than requiring the researchers to return roughly \$1 million in unspent funding when the grant ended, the sci-

entists recently received permission to share the money among the four institutions to wrap up their projects by February of 2017.

UI entomologist Sanford Eigenbrode, director for the REACCH grant, said their application was among several multi-year climate change and variability programs funded under USDA's program. Two other projects focused on agriculture funded under the grant were also recently extended for an extra year — one studying climate change and Iowa corn and another researching how changing climate may affect pine plantations in 10 Southeastern states.

Eigenbrode said the Northwest REACCH grant has already resulted in about 150 scientific publications.

"I think we're going to

have a lot of publications in year six," Eigenbrode said.

Modeling conducted by grant researchers has found Northwest agriculture should fare better in the face of a changing climate than production in other regions, as warmer temperatures could potentially help yields in spuds, wheat and fruit. In the short term, he believes information from the grant will provide growers insight into topics such as diversifying cropping systems, improving sustainability of their systems, the efficient application of inputs and conservation tillage.

"The project has got just about every discipline you can think of from the agronomists, to the economists to the weed scientists," Eigenbrode said.

Eigenbrode said there won't be nearly as much work

ongoing as during the height of the grant, but the extension will allow some crop rotational studies to be finished, and give researchers time to finalize publications. At the beginning of the grant, researchers surveyed regional growers on their beliefs about climate change, finding the majority have seen weather changes during their lifetimes, but most aren't concerned about global warming, or convinced it's caused by humans. The survey is being updated, and results should be available by late spring.

During year six, a REACCH grant-funded cereals handbook, with about 14 chapters highlighting data from grant projects and other information pertaining to climate and cereal production, will be produced for distribution to growers.