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California

March storms could boost CVP water deliveries

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO—While they’re giving informal updates to water districts, federal water officials in California have put off announcing Central Valley Project allocations until they see what this month’s storms will bring.

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation spokesman Shane Hunt didn’t flinch when asked if the “March Miracle” of abundant rain and snow that many had hoped for is coming to fruition.



AP Photo/Eric Risberg

Mustard is seen between the rows of vineyards flooded by water from the Russian River March 11 in Forestville, Calif. Flood watches and warnings blanketed Northern California as the latest in a series of storms moved through, adding more moisture to an already wet March.

He responded by noting er stations along the Sacramento River in Northern

California had received their average precipitation for the month by about March 9.

“It’s changed so significantly from the first of the month,” Hunt said of the state’s water outlook. He noted that Shasta Lake, the centerpiece of the federal Central Valley Project, had an inflow of 325,000 acre-feet just in the first 10 days of March.

“Those Shasta numbers are encouraging,” he said, adding that continued rain and snow “will help us build a cold water pool and protect the winter (salmon) run, which is vital for us to operate the system.”

In the San Joaquin Valley, growers are becoming more confident they’ll get at least some federal water for the first time in three years, as some estimates have put the amount of agricultural water south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta at 15 percent.

“We’re trying to stay optimistic, hoping that it will mean a larger allocation is coming,” said Laura Brown, California Citrus Mutual’s director of government affairs. “We’ve seen them at least thus far giving us above a zero allocation, which is what we had. ... I understand the bureau is being very cautious.”

The early March deluge throughout the state broke precipitation levels in some areas and pushed the statewide snow water content, which had been 80 percent of normal at the beginning of the month, to 88 percent of normal as of March 14, according to the state Department of Water Resources.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Valerie La Haie of G and S Farms in Brentwood, Calif., arranges corn at a farmers’ market in Davis, Calif., in September 2015. The Center for Produce Safety is halfway to its goal of raising \$20 million for research into food safety issues.

Donation helps group’s search for solutions to produce safety issues

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

WOODLAND, Calif. — An organization’s effort to help produce growers and distributors avoid contaminating the food they handle is halfway to its goal of raising \$20 million for research.

A \$1 million donation from Western Growers has enabled the Center for Produce Safety to reach the \$10 million mark for such projects as closely watching how pathogens behave and determining which sanitizers work best for different contaminants.

The center, which is based in Woodland, hopes to reach its fundraising goal by 2020 to continue to help the industry develop safety precautions as the Food Safety Modernization Act starts to be implemented.

The donation from Western Growers, which represents farmers who grow fresh produce, continues nearly a decade of collaboration between the two organizations, president and chief executive officer Tom Nassif said.

“The safety of consumers is a top priority for our industry,”

he said, adding that he encourages “every farm-to-fork stakeholder” to consider how they can contribute to building “the strongest food safety system in the world.”

In addition to the grant, individual Western Growers members have given \$4.4 million for the center’s research, Nassif told reporters in a March 10 conference call.

Founded in 2007, the Center for Produce Safety is a partnership involving people in the industry, government and the scientific and academic communities, according to its website. In total, the center has given out \$18.4 million over the years for such projects as assessing the food-safety impacts of delays between pistachio harvest and drying,

Research funded by the center has led to improved safety practices, including designating buffer zones for hazard management, validating the efficacy of the washing process and identifying controls that prevent salmonella from building tolerances to treatments, according to a news release.

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New wheat commission director starts March 22

Fernandez hopes to meet farmers, hear their priorities

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

The California Wheat Commission has a new director.

Deanna Fernandez will join the commission March 22. She was previously international program director with the Raisin Administrative Committee in Fresno, Calif. She replaces Janice Cooper, who took over as director of the Wheat Marketing Center in Portland in December.

“I have ideas and a vision that will position California wheat as a premium product on a global scale,” Fernandez said in an email to the Capital Press.

The commission will also



Fernandez

work to expand research by collaborating with academia and the private sector and educate the public about the health benefits of wheat, she

said.

Fernandez plans to meet as many farmers as possible before the end of the calendar year, she said. She expects to conduct meetings in each growing region.

“I want to meet each farmer — I want to know what issues farmers are most concerned with because, ultimately, I work for each California wheat grower,” she said.

Roy Motter, chairman of the commission, said an executive search firm proposed Fernandez with several other candidates from outside the state.

“It was a pretty substantial

advantage to have somebody who was familiar with the regulatory environment in California,” Motter said. “She was quite involved in the off-shore marketing efforts of the raisin commission.”

Fernandez will work to get familiar with wheat, Motter said.

“I think she’s a quick study,” he said. “We’re pretty excited to have her on board here. I think she’s going to hit the ground running. She’s going to be a strong administrator for our marketing efforts and research efforts.”

Fernandez said she grew up in agriculture, as her parents were farmers. She found mentors at the raisin committee and fostered relationships with raisin growers and handlers, Foreign Agricultural Service employees and “the plethora of fellow ag nerds around the globe.”

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