

# An uncertain FUTURE

Water, workers, trade and Trump among the many issues facing agriculture in 2017



By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

**M**ore water but maybe less regulation. Expanding yields and shrinking labor pools. Big Ag and Big Data taking root amid the blossoming of small farms. A political climate in which some want to drain the swamp while others clamor to conserve the watershed.

Got a crystal ball? Or, more in step with the times, a prognosticating drone? The agricultural outlook for 2017 is cloudy.

"I think we're going into a very uncertain period for producers and the food system, because the new administration coming in will be a little less predictable, perhaps," said Rose Hayden-Smith, a former county extension agent who edits the University of California's "Food Observer" blog.

## Trump and trade

Didn't take long to get to President-elect Trump, did it? But no matter how you voted, the incoming administration poses a conundrum for some producers. Many of them supported him — Trump took up to 80 percent of the vote in many rural counties — but disagree with some of his espoused policies.

For example, producers who ship wheat, blueberries, Christmas trees and other goods to Asia favored the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the trade agreement Trump vowed to cancel.

And if Trump's campaign bad-mouthing of major trade partner China are an indication of what's ahead, "Holy cow," said Hayden-Smith.

"We are not a food system in isolation," she said. "If we have poor relations with China and the World Trade Organization, it could throw the global food system into crisis."

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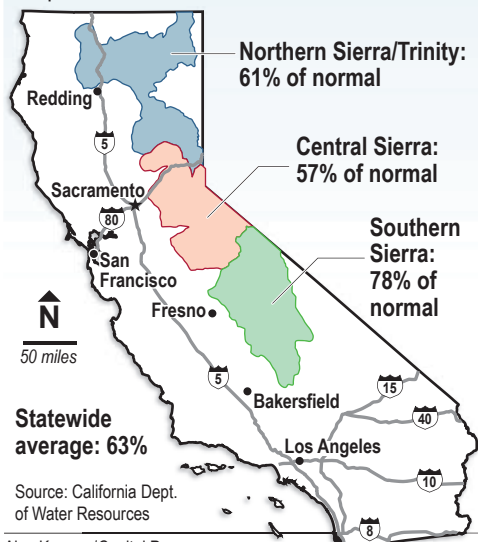
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## California snow water equivalents

Percent of the historic average snow water equivalent for Dec. 22, measured in inches.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Zippy Duvall, the new president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, speaks at the organization's annual convention in Orlando, Fla. He believes the Trump administration will bring relief from over-regulation.

# Above normal Owyhee snowpack raises irrigators' hopes



Courtesy of Owyhee Irrigation District

Snowpack in the Owyhee basin, which feeds water into the Owyhee Reservoir, is shown in this aerial photo taken Feb. 26.

## Water managers stress that it's still early

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

Snowpack in the Owyhee River basin is well above normal for this time of year, which is a positive early sign for farmers in Eastern Oregon who receive their irrigation water from the Owyhee Reservoir.

"It's certainly a good start and

good news," said Malheur County farmer Bruce Corn, a member of the Owyhee Irrigation District board of directors. "We're still quite early in the season ... but we're cautiously optimistic."

The reservoir provides water for 1,800 farms and 118,000 irrigated acres in Eastern Oregon and part of southwestern Idaho.

Those farms received their

full 4 acre-foot allotment of irrigation water in 2016 after receiving only a third of their allotment in 2014 and 2015 because of drought conditions.

There was 166,000 acre-feet of carryover water in the reservoir at the end of the 2016 water year, less than normal but much more than what was left in 2015 and 2014.

The reservoir had 205,000 acre-feet of water as of Dec. 21.

Total snowpack in the Owyhee

basin was 144 percent of average as of Dec. 22.

With the current abundant snowpack, "We're in a much better position than where we've been the past several years," Corn said. "We have a ways to go but things are looking promising."

Across the border in Idaho, total snowpack in the Boise River basin is at 99 percent of normal.

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# ESPA study suggests water credit trading program

## Income loses less with credits than with across the board water cuts

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

BOISE — A study finds implementing an irrigation credit trading program could lessen the financial blow to Eastern Snake Plain ground-

water users forced to curb their pumping under a recent water call settlement.

WestWater Research assigned an intern, Ryan Shepler, to evaluate the most effective ways for Idaho Ground Water Appropriators, Inc.,

groundwater districts to meet a 240,000 acre-foot annual reduction in aquifer withdrawals mandated under the terms of a 2015 settlement with the Surface Water Coalition.

The reduction averages 12 percent per user, with the

amount varying based on priority dates of groundwater rights.

Shepler explained a credit program would pay willing growers scheduled to plant low-value crops, such as wheat, on marginal ground to fallow those acres. Resulting

irrigation credits could then be sold to others within the groundwater district in need of water to finish off high-value crops on more productive land.

"With this credit trading system, only the lowest value land is idled, and the rest

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