

Calif. storms help fill reservoirs but slow ag work

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Big rains in California have dumped more than a million acre-feet of water into the state's reservoirs since Jan. 1 but this week stalled the Central Valley's navel and mandarin orange harvests, state and industry officials say.

The storms had added 1.1 million acre-feet of water to California's reservoirs by Jan. 9 with more to come, according to state officials, while prompting the opening of the Sacramento Weir — a flood-control bypass around the city — for the first time since 2006.

Shasta Lake, the Central Valley Project's main reservoir, was at 81 percent of capacity as of Jan. 11 while Lake Oroville, the chief reservoir for the State Water Project, was at 74 percent of capacity, according to the Department of Water Resources.

As of Jan. 11, California's snow-water content had vaulted to 158 percent of normal statewide after being just 70 percent of normal a week earlier. The southern Sierra Nevada's snowpack was at 187 percent of normal for this time of year, according to the DWR's California Data Exchange Center.

This week saw a one-two punch of "atmospheric river" mega-storms aimed at California, with the first on Jan. 7-8 bringing rain, heavy winds and local flooding and the second on Jan. 10-11 expected to pile as much as 6 feet of snow on the mountains, according to the National Weather Service.

But the rain wasn't all good news for farmers.

More than 2 inches of rain in the Central Valley's prime citrus grow-



Eric Risberg/Associated Press

Vineyards remain flooded in the Russian River Valley Monday in Forestville, Calif. A massive storm system stretching from California into Nevada lifted rivers beyond their banks, flooded vineyards and forced people to evacuate the area.

ing region has made the ground too wet to move equipment and increased the risk that wet fruit could be blemished, said Joel Nelsen, president of the Exeter, Calif.-based California Citrus Mutual.

While the rain is welcome after four years of drought, the timing has been a little frustrating for growers, Nelsen acknowledged.

"We're in the middle of a good harvest," he said. "This is when we start our exports to Korea and Japan, and the international scene is quite attractive right now. It (the weather) affects volume."

Another concern for citrus growers is if temperatures suddenly drop after the rains clear out and water

still on the fruit freezes, causing surface blemishes that force growers to destroy the fruit, Nelsen said. But that wasn't in the forecast as of Jan. 10, he said.

Most of California has been soggy since New Year's Day, with some valley areas getting as much as 5 inches of rain in the first week of 2017 and as much as 14 inches of rain falling in some mountain communities, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

On farms, the rain has helped the growth of planted grains and field crops continue at an excellent rate, NASS reports, but it has brought field work to a standstill.

At Shasta College in Redding,

Calif., frequent storms have prevented the farm from planting some of its grain fields, farm manager B.J. Macfarlane said. The farm grows all of its hay and grains to avoid having to purchase feed for its livestock.

"We're not complaining, but it's messed up our farming, the water coming like it has," Macfarlane said. "But I've planted grain in January and February and been just fine."

Fruit and nut growers have been pruning orchards and shredding the brush as the weather has allowed, but vineyard operations had to stop most post-harvest field activities because of the rain, NASS reported.

But no major damage to fruit and nut orchards because of high winds

or flooding had been reported, local Farm Bureau and University of California Cooperative Extension officials said.

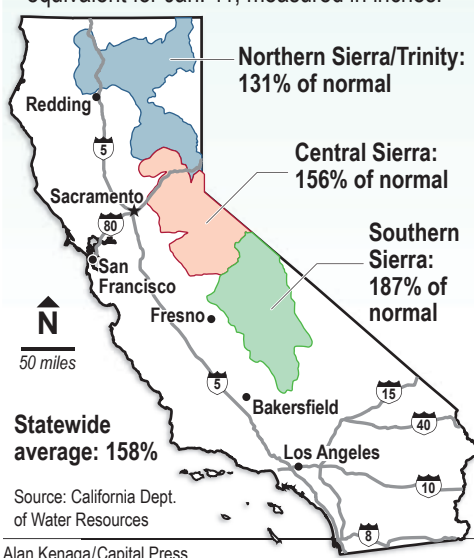
"The water, so far, is a good thing here," Fresno County Farm Bureau executive director Ryan Jacobsen said in an email.

Many orchardists took steps ahead of time to prevent large-scale orchard damage from wind and flooding, including applying zinc in the fall to help drop the leaves and making sure they have good drainage, said Dani Lightle, a UCCE farm adviser in Orland, Calif.

The biggest worry for nut growers is developing root rot from standing water, she said.

California snow water equivalents

Percent of the historic average snow water equivalent for Jan. 11, measured in inches.



Source: California Dept. of Water Resources
Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

Bird flu detected in Montana mallard duck

Virus similar to 2014-15 outbreak

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

A mallard duck harvested in Montana in late December tested positive for highly pathogenic bird flu, the World Organization for Animal Health and the USDA announced Wednesday.

The duck was infected with a mix of Eurasian and North American bird flu viruses that created a strain similar to the one first found in the U.S. in a northern pintail duck in Whatcom County in northwestern Washington in December 2014.

In the following six months, bird flu spread to 15 states, claiming 50.4 million chickens and turkeys,

"This appears to be one

of the strains we saw during the outbreak in 2014 and 2015," USDA Chief Veterinarian Jack Shere said in a written statement. "This finding serves as a powerful reminder that there is still avian influenza circulating in wild birds, and producers and industry need to continue to be vigilant about biosecurity to protect domestic poultry."

Migratory waterfowl carry the disease, but are immune from its ill effects.

To detect the circulation of the virus, the USDA and other federal and state agencies have tested nearly 30,000 wild birds in the past six months. The duck sampled Dec. 27 in Fergus County, Mont., was the second confirmed case of highly pathogenic bird flu since July. A mallard duck at a wildlife refuge in Alaska tested positive in August.

Judge rules in million-dollar disputes

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

Two million-dollar-plus disputes between agricultural interests have been decided.

In one, an Idaho packing company owes \$1.3 million for potatoes that a farmer delivered to an intermediary but wasn't paid for, a federal judge ruled.

The ruling by Chief U.S. District Judge Lynn Winnmill concludes about three years of litigation between farmer Kirk Jacobs, Taylor Produce and the Idaho Potato Packers Corp.

Previous court decisions held that Taylor Produce failed to pay Jacobs for more than \$1.3 million worth of potatoes in violation of the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act, or PACA, which requires proceeds from

crops to be held in trust for growers.

While Taylor Produce packaged and shipped the potatoes, the sales were handled by the Idaho Potato Packers Corp., or IPPC.

Jacobs claimed that IPPC improperly deducted \$1.3 million in expenses for marketing, freight, packaging materials and commissions from potato proceeds that were to be turned over to Taylor Produce.

The judge has now agreed that the proceeds from IPPC's potato sales were PACA trust assets belonging to Jacobs that the packing company wrongly converted by deducting those expenses.

Winnmill said that "IPPC has not established that the various expenses it seeks to recoup can be traced to Jacob's potatoes" or that the deductions were even authorized under its marketing agreement with Taylor Produce.

For that reason, IPPC and its subsidiaries are liable to Jacobs for the \$1.3 million in potato proceeds, the judge said.

In the other dispute, Winnmill recently resolved a lingering financial dispute between the H.J. Heinz Co. and a former supplier, the Bright Harvest Sweet Potato Co.

Bright Harvest filed a complaint against Heinz three years ago, alleging the food company had reneged on a contract to buy sweet potato fries after building its own processing facility in Ontario, Ore.

A jury found that Heinz hadn't breached the contract in 2015, but Winnmill overturned that finding, ruling that the jury's conclusion wasn't supported by the evidence at trial.

After a second trial, a jury awarded Bright Harvest more than \$1.2 million in damages, which was challenged by Heinz.

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