

# Record heat, continued winter fallout flummox Calif. growers

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

CORNING, Calif. — Growers in California are still taking stock of winter and early-spring damage to their crops while the latest heat wave is accelerating their harvests.

Robert Mills, who grows peaches, apricots and other fruit in the northern Sacramento Valley, was sending peach-picking crews out in the early morning this week to avoid temperatures expected to soar as high as 116 degrees.

With wet storms leaving his orchards under water for weeks, Mills lost as much as 90 percent of his apricot crop and saw many of his young peach trees ruined, he said. Other growers faced similar troubles, he said.

“The big story is just the weather,” said Mills, co-owner of R and K Orchards in Corning. He said he lost as much as one-third of his early-variety peaches to pit split.

As for the heat, Mills’ fresh-market peaches can ripen on the outside quickly and



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Workers unload freshly picked peaches in a warehouse at R and K Orchards in Corning, Calif. on July 31. California growers are grappling with complications from the wet winter and early spring as well as several heat waves this summer.

drop or essentially cook on the tree. But he hasn’t seen significant damage, at least yet, he said.

“You just keep the tree well watered,” he said.

Mills is one of many growers still assessing damage to their crops from this winter’s floods and heavy storms, which

in some areas left orchards and fields flooded until May.

At the same time, they’ve had to protect their crops from sunburn and step up harvest schedules as this week’s afternoon highs set records in many areas. For instance, Redding was expected to top out at 116 on Aug. 1 and 114 Aug. 2, while

Corning anticipated a high of 110 on Aug. 2, according to the National Weather Service.

One of the wettest winters in California history has been followed by one of the hottest summers. In Red Bluff, Aug. 1 was the 12th straight day with triple-digit temperatures, and the community recorded 23 days of highs of 100 degrees or hotter in July.

For some growers of summer vegetables, the heat has disrupted bee activity, they said.

“Everything is a couple of weeks slower,” said Rassmy Mua of Mua’s Family Garden in Chico, whose fresh produce includes tomatoes, squash and onions. “There’s flowering, but it’s not getting pollinated so there’s not as much fruit.”

Chum Creek Meadow Organic Farm near Redding is having the same issue with its squash, owner Mary Occasion said. The farm started late with planting because of spring rains, she said.

But most of her plantings are doing well. “They love the heat,” she said.

Extreme heat can cause

numerous headaches for growers. It can damage the leaves of young walnut trees, producing darker kernels that don’t bring as much of a premium. It can cause blue prune, in which plums for prunes drop prematurely.

It can also cause Valencia oranges to re-green, prompting growers to use corrective sprays that prevent the fruit from being shipped to some trading destinations. This year’s harvest is winding down because of high temperatures and fruit availability, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

The heat has caused the processing tomato harvest in the Central Valley to be erratic, interrupting the smooth flow of tomatoes to the canneries, according to NASS. The crop is already diminished because of a global glut of the fruit.

For nut growers, sunburn is always a concern, said Franz Niederholzer, a University of California Cooperative Extension adviser in Colusa.

“There is some sunburn

out there, although I’ve not heard how much there is,” he said.

The heat has accelerated some almond harvests, with shakers already working in the Arbuckle area, Niederholzer said. Almonds are also being harvested in the warmer regions of Kern County, while harvest preparations are being made in other areas, NASS reports.

“I know all the growers are keeping an eye on the temperatures and adjusting as needed,” Niederholzer said.

Prune trees, some of which suffered root damage from flooding and are showing signs of potassium deficiency, now are also having trouble making sugar because of the heat, he said.

And the heat is also sapping nutritional quality from rangeland grasses and affecting milk production, according to NASS.

A respite may not happen soon. The federal Climate Prediction Center foresees above-normal temperatures lingering into the fall throughout the West.

# Ports hail longshore contract extension

By **DAN WHEAT**  
Capital Press

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union and the Pacific Maritime Association have agreed to a three-year extension of their current contract, which was due to expire in 2019.

PMA President James McKenna announced the extension July 28, saying PMA proposed a contract extension earlier in the year with the intent to create long-term certainty for West Coast ports and all stakeholders. The PMA negotiates labor agreements on behalf of port operators.

“Early voting returns show strong ILWU support for our proposal, which would ensure labor stability through 2022. This historic agreement will be great news for the maritime industry, as well as our customers, workers, port communities and the U.S. economy,” McKenna



Courtesy of Port of Seattle

A container ship is loaded at the Port of Seattle. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union and the Pacific Maritime Association have agreed to extend their contract, heading off the potential for another work slowdown or strike at 29 West Coast container ports.

said in a released statement.

The extension is subject to final confirmation by the ILWU and is expected next week, he said. It covers workers at all 29 West Coast container ports.

“Agricultural exporters are greatly relieved that we have now removed one of the primary motivations for the West Coast meltdown of a few years ago,” Peter Friedmann, execu-

tive director of the Agriculture Transportation Coalition in Washington, D.C., told Capital Press.

Inability of the ILWU and PMA to reach a new contract three years ago led to a months-long union work slowdown that cost farmers, manufacturers and retailers across the U.S. hundreds of millions of dollars in losses because they could not

get exported or imported goods to market.

Last November, U.S. Reps. Dave Reichert and Dan Newhouse, both R-Wash., and Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., renewed their plea for the PMA and ILWU to work together to avoid another slowdown.

They said the 2014-2015 disruption cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$7 billion. Growers dumped spoiled produce, manufacturers were delayed in getting parts and retailers had empty shelves, the representatives wrote in a letter to PMA and ILWU.

“The impact was not limited to the West Coast but ultimately was felt by communities across the country and the larger economy,” they wrote. A Newhouse bill requiring greater collection and reporting of port statistics annually to keep supply chains stable was passed and signed into law.

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# Compliance dates for some new food safety rules could be extended

By **SEAN ELLIS**  
Capital Press

SUN VALLEY, Idaho — The initial compliance dates for some of the standards included in the Food and Drug Administration’s new food safety rules could be extended.

The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture is working closely with the FDA to ensure the rules for enforcing the Food Safety Modernization Act don’t unduly burden farmers, Bob Ehart, senior policy and science adviser for the group, said. He spoke at the annual meeting of the Western Association of State Departments of Agriculture.

NASDA will also work with the agency to implement the rules since most state agriculture departments will enforce them.

“We have a lot of work to do yet,” Ehart said. “It’s partly a fairness issue to the farmer and, frankly, to society. When we’re doing this, we need to make sure we do it well.”

Jeff Farrar, FDA’s director of intergovernmental affairs and partnerships, told WASDA members the agency has not yet released all of the guidance on the rules necessary for training.

The most concerning part of FDA’s new food safety standards for many farmers is the agency’s produce rule, which includes minimal microbial standards for water that comes in contact with produce that is likely to be consumed raw.

“We’re working hard to finalize the guidance that is needed for the produce rule,” Farrar said. “Once the guidance is finalized, then the training can take place.”

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