

# Harvey relief won't jeopardize dam funds

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

OROVILLE, Calif. — The massive relief effort underway for victims of Hurricane Harvey won't jeopardize funding to rebuild the Oroville Dam, a Federal Emergency Management Agency official told the Capital Press.

While the cost of cleaning up after Harvey's flood waters in Texas and Louisiana has been estimated to be in the billions of dollars, relief for damage from California's storms last winter is treated as separate, said Victor Inge, a FEMA external affairs officer for the West Coast region.

"In the immediate sense,

nothing has changed here," said Inge, a member of an incident management team sent to California in February. "We're proceeding as business as usual."

FEMA did send some relief workers from California to the Gulf Coast to help while "at the same time we retained enough staff so that it would not affect the operation here and enough staff that we're poised for anything that can happen," Inge said.

Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Calif., whose district includes the Lake Oroville area, said he's received similar assurances from FEMA officials.

"We've just met with

FEMA yesterday and it's an ongoing issue but I think (it) is being handled OK for now," LaMalfa said Aug. 30 in a message via Facebook.

State Department of Water Resources spokeswoman Erin Mellon said it's "our understanding as well" that Oroville funding won't be affected by Harvey.

The assurances come as crews are in the midst of a \$275.4 million repair and reconstruction project at the Oroville Dam, whose spillways nearly failed in February. Spillway ruptures led to the two-day evacuation of about 188,000 area residents and threatened a large portion of the Eastern Sacramento Val-

ley's \$1.5 billion agriculture industry, including rice and tree crops and several processors along the Highway 99 corridor between Chico and Yuba City.

While the dam's refurbishment will take several years to complete, work on the main spillway recently passed the midway point for this summer and is on track to be finished by Nov. 1, officials said.

The ongoing construction has complicated water allocations by the State Water Project, for which Lake Oroville is the main reservoir. The project irrigates more than 600,000 acres of Central Valley farmland and serves 20 million customers in the

San Francisco Bay area and Southern California.

So far, FEMA has allocated \$43 million in relief for California, which includes Oroville and numerous other repairs of roads, bridges and other facilities throughout the state that were damaged by last winter's heavy storms and flooding, Inge said.

President Donald Trump has committed up to \$274 million for the Oroville project, but the grants will come in phases as work proceeds, LaMalfa noted. The federal commitments came before the Category 4 Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas on Aug. 25, creating a flood zone the size of Lake Michigan

and causing one of the most expensive natural disasters in American history.

Joel Myers, founder and president of AccuWeather, believes Harvey will end up being costlier than hurricanes Katrina and Sandy combined. He predicts the disaster will cause a \$190 billion hit to the American economy, or 1 percent of the total gross domestic product.

"The disaster is just beginning in certain areas," Myers said in a statement. "Parts of Houston, the United States' fourth largest city, will be uninhabitable for weeks and possibly months due to water damage, mold, disease-ridden water and all that will follow this 1,000-year flood."

## Prune harvest starts slowly as fruit gains in size, flavor

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

RED BLUFF, Calif. — The harvest of an anticipated 105,000-ton prune crop is off to a late start as growers wait for fruit with the desired size and flavor.

A failed crop last year left trees with such a heavy load this season that many growers thinned their crops, but they're still having a hard time getting the remaining fruit to size, said Dani Lightle, a University of California Cooperative Extension farm adviser.

"Many of them even after thinning couldn't get their numbers down to where they needed to be," Lightle said.

In addition, the big loads and hot afternoons have slowed the prunes' process of sweetening on the tree.

"We're getting off to a slow start," said Tyler Christensen, a grower in Red Bluff. "It's kind of late. The sugar is still coming up in the fruit."

While some growers are waiting a few extra days to send the shakers into the orchard, they can only wait so long.

"You're looking at firmness to decide when to harvest," Lightle said. "Once you get to that point, it's time to go."

This year's prune crop is expected to be more than double the 51,000 tons of prunes that came out of dryers in 2016, according to the



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

A worker pushes flats of harvested plums along a track at the Mill Race Dryer in Red Bluff, Calif., on Aug. 29 as a bin full of finished prunes sits in the foreground. The harvest of a heavy prune crop is underway in California.

National Agricultural Statistics Service. Rain and wind during last year's bloom spoiled the crop.

This year, plum trees for prunes took advantage of breaks in the rain to achieve decent pollination.

Like many fruit producers, prune growers use a refractometer to measure the sugar content in prunes. The goal is to reach 24 meters, or brix, of sugar, but heavy tree loads can hinder the fruit from reaching that goal.

The difficulties come as the industry has been trying to market California prunes as a higher-quality alternative to those from competitors such as Chile and Argentina.

Industry insiders say that South American growers' practice of sun-drying plums rather than putting them in dryers produces prunes that are smaller, less sweet and less nutritious, but they can be sold for about half the price of California prunes.

## Almond advocates seek farm bill funding

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

MODESTO, Calif. — An advocacy group for the almond industry is pushing for more money in the 2018 Farm Bill for trade promotion, conservation, research and other initiatives.

There have been no funding increases for several important programs in the last two farm bills while the challenges facing agriculture "have exploded," said Kelly Covello, president of the Almond Alliance of California.

On the subject of trade, Covello said the Market Access Program, the Foreign Market Development Program and Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops are among the programs that are crucial for continued economic growth.

However, funding for MAP hasn't increased since 2006 and Foreign Market Development hasn't had a boost since 2002, she said.

Covello wants Congress to increase MAP funding from \$200 million to \$400

million annually and bring Foreign Market funding from \$34.5 million to \$69 million a year. She said she understands it's a tall order.

"Under the current administration there is pressure to reduce costs within the federal government, so Congress has work to do to balance these two objectives as they draft the 2018 Farm Bill," she told the Capital Press in an email.

Covello recently made her pitch at a recent farm bill listening session in Modesto attended by several members of the House Agriculture Committee, including chairman Mike Conaway, R-Texas, Doug LaMalfa and Jeff Denham, both R-Calif., and Dwight Evans, D-Pa.

About 75 speakers gave three hours of testimony on all aspects of the farm bill.

"California provides the country with an abundance of products, including fruits, vegetables, dairy, nuts, livestock and nursery products," Conaway said. "This wide cross-section of U.S. agricul-

ture makes California a critical stop as we travel across the country hearing from producers about improvements to our nation's farm policy."

Almond production directly and indirectly contributes more than \$21.5 billion annually to California's economy and creates more than 100,000 jobs, according to University of California-Davis researchers.

Bearing acreage is expected to reach the 1 million mark this year, more than double the 418,000 acres that bore almonds in 1995, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

As growers have become more environmentally conscious, of importance is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which provides funding for meeting certain standards, Covello said.

For instance, the industry has used EQIP to upgrade agricultural motors in the San Joaquin Valley to help the region meet federal air quality standards, she said.



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