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## California

### Disease puts Florida citrus production behind that of California

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — The devastation of the deadly tree disease huanglongbing has caused Florida to fall behind California in total citrus production for the first time in decades.

The Golden State produced 3.9 million tons of citrus fruit in the 2016-2017 season compared to 3.5 million tons from Florida, according to a National Agricultural Statistics Service report.

Florida's 410,700 bearing acres still tops California, which grows citrus on 268,500 acres. But Florida's yields have fallen dramatically from the 500 million tons the state produced just two years ago.

California's ascension comes as huanglongbing, or citrus greening, has slammed the citrus industry in the U.S. southeast, causing an average loss of 7,513 jobs per year and costing growers nearly \$3 billion in revenue, the University of Florida has estimated.

"It's devastating because it just points out how disastrous HLB is," said Bob Blakely, vice president of the Exeter-based California Citrus Mutual. He noted that Florida had been approaching 1 million acres of citrus before the disease hit.

"They've lost over half of their citrus production, and most of that was lost in the last eight years to HLB," Blakely said.

Fresh production in Florida has declined 83 percent since the 1995-96 season while total citrus production has declined 74 percent, Citrus Mutual explains on its website.

When HLB was first discovered in 2005, growers at first thought grapefruit would be more tolerant of the disease than other citrus varieties, but grapefruit groves eventually succumbed, too, the organization notes.

"They're on the verge of not even being able to produce enough fruit to maintain their infrastructure," Blakely said. "They have plants closing and packing houses closing. It certainly concerns us that that could happen in California if we can't control this disease."

Only 26 packing houses in Florida boxed up fresh citrus last year, and four of them have announced they will close. Just 22 years ago, the state had 65 packing houses that shipped more than 150,000 cartons each, CCM explained.

While it does not harm humans, huanglongbing is fatal to citrus trees and has no cure. The disease has been detected in more than 70 citrus trees in Southern California urban areas, but the disease has not yet migrated into the Golden State's commercial groves.

California is seeking to slow the spread of the disease to buy time for research. A quarantine covers about one-third of California, and Gov. Jerry Brown signed a budget in June that includes \$10 million from the general fund for the state's Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Program. The allocation follows legislation this year that will enable the citrus industry to increase its 9-cent assessment to support the program.

Growers have invested more than \$100 million into the program since 2009, according to Citrus Mutual. Most of that money has gone to trapping, treatments and surveys in urban areas to stop the spread of the Asian citrus psyllid, which can carry huanglongbing.

The industry has devoted \$15 million toward HLB research and education, including \$8 million from the grower-funded California Citrus Research Foundation to construct a biosecurity-level 3 lab near the University of California-Riverside.

### Table olives' high yields offset by rising costs

Labor costs and increased global competition are frustrating for growers

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Table olive growers in California expect an abundant crop and good prices, but the industry is still frustrated by rising production costs and increased global competition.

This year's anticipated 73,000-ton crop would be up 9 percent from last year's 67,100-ton crop, according to a National Agricultural Statistics Service survey.

Bearing acreage is estimated at 19,000, which results in a yield of 3.84 tons per acre, NASS reports.

"It looks like it's going to be a better crop than normal," said Adin Hester, president of the Cloverdale-based Olive Growers Council of California. "It could be a little bit higher than we expected."

Hester said prices to growers will likely be a little less than last year's average of about \$1,100 per ton, which was near an all-time high.

However, production costs this past year were above \$2,000 per acre,



Tim Hearden/Capital Press File

This year's table olive crop in California is expected to be slightly larger than last year, but rising labor costs and increased global competition frustrate growers.

which includes harvesting costs of between \$450 and \$550 per ton, he said.

With the lingering labor shortage, some growers may need to boost their harvest costs even further, Hester said.

Another issue, Hester said, is that domestic table olives are being undercut by cheaper, subsidized Spanish olives that have flooded the marketplace.

Black, sliced olives from Spain

have practically taken over the food service sector, as they are used on everything from pizzas to buffet bars, he said.

"When you look at the acreage difference, Spain's got five and a half million acres of olives" including oil olives, Hester said.

"Now they're matching us ton for ton."

The table olive industry is urging the U.S. Commerce Department to consider placing duties on Spanish

olives, he said.

In the orchards, this is an "on" year for the alternate-bearing trees, which bore about 78,000 tons in 2015.

Favorable temperatures and increased rainfall improved growing conditions this year, as a cold January and February led to good floral development with a high bloom and adequate pollen, NASS reported.

Some growers were concerned that high temperatures during the summer bloom could reduce the set, according to NASS.

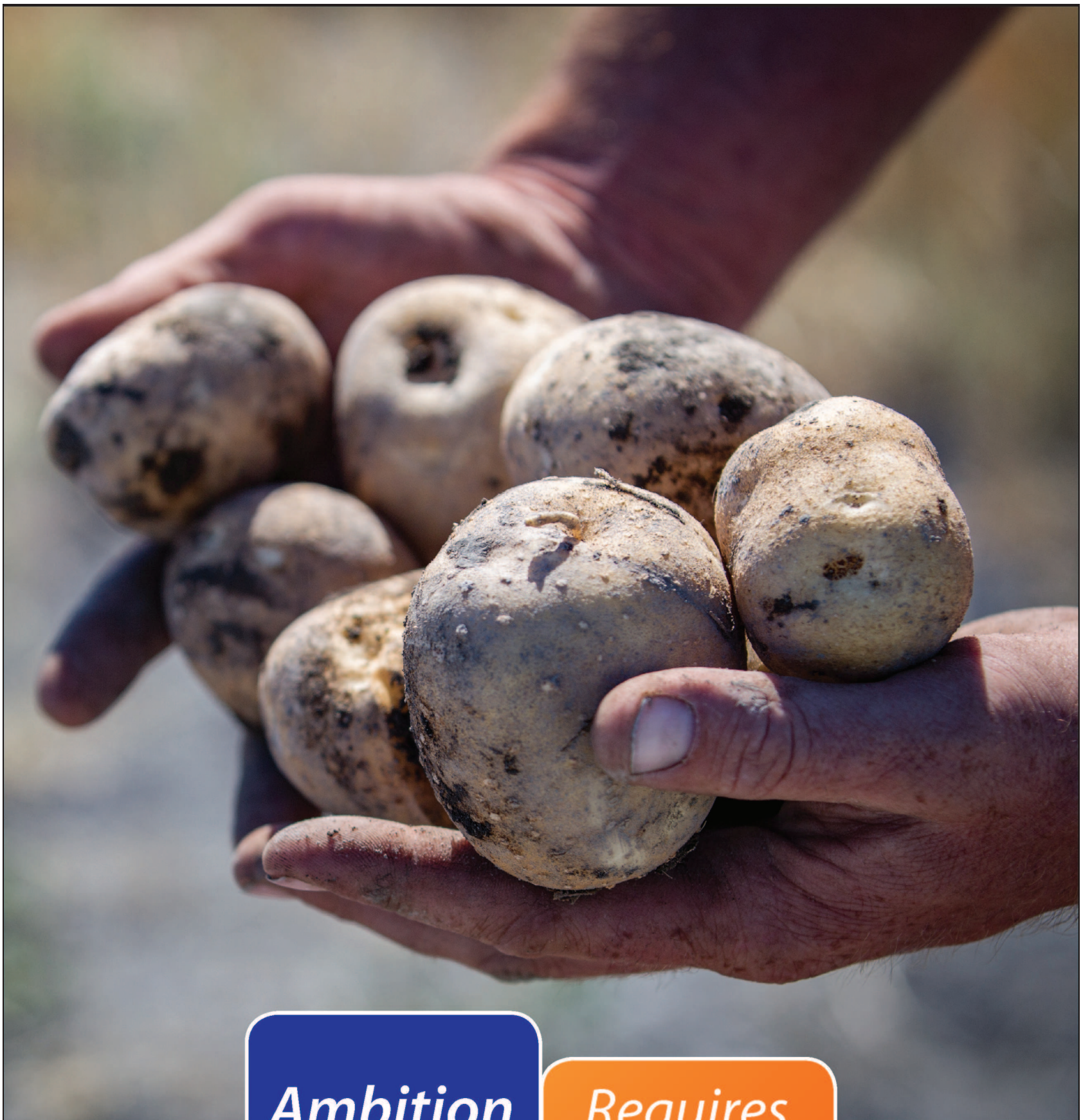
But the crop portends a third season of relative stability for a commodity whose yields saw wild ups and downs in recent years, peaking at a record 170,000 tons in 2010 but coming in below 40,000 tons four times since 2006.

The last time was in 2014, when freezes and a lack of water led to yields of only 37,120 tons.

The uncertainty prompted many growers to switch to more lucrative nuts or navel oranges, bringing acreage down from a peak of 38,000 about a decade ago.

However, this year's projected bearing acreage is even with last year's and up slightly from the roughly 18,000 acres of table olives grown in 2015.

NASS established this year's forecast based on reports from 142 growers around the state, the agency reported.



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