



Tim Hearden/For the Capital Press

Allan Fulton, a University of California Cooperative Extension irrigation and water resources adviser based in Red Bluff, checks a water pump in an orchard near Corning, Calif., on Dec. 15. He said some growers have begun to run irrigation because of a lack of rainfall in December.

## Dry December turns on Calif. irrigation

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
For the Capital Press

RED BLUFF, Calif. — The dry spell in California this December has prompted some growers to begin irrigating again, but no one appears to fear a return to drought conditions, agricultural insiders say.

Mild afternoons and chilly nights have growers watering “in moderation” to aid new root activity in orchards or to protect against frost, said Allan Fulton, a University of California Cooperative Extension irrigation and water resources adviser.

“In almonds, it’s only 60 days before the likelihood that bloom will start to emerge,” said Fulton, who is based in Red Bluff. “With each passing day that the rains don’t come, there’s growing concern.”

Lindauer River Ranch, which grows walnuts and plums for prunes, is irrigating its younger orchards, manager Michael Vasey said.

“They’re not using very much water,” he said, adding that the measure is more for frost protection. “When it’s dry, there’s more damage.”

Butte County Farm Bureau executive director Colleen Cecil’s family’s small walnut operation recently started irrigating, she said.

“We don’t look forward to those winter PG&E bills,” Cecil said. “(Growers) are making decisions based on how much moisture is in the soil and the age of the trees. ... The orchard guys are talking about how much longer they’re going to go before having to turn the water on.”

However, Cecil doesn’t notice a sense of foreboding among farmers.

“I personally am looking at it,” she said. “I know how important that snow is up in the mountains, too.”

One silver lining in the lack of clouds is that growers have had ample opportunity to complete postharvest chores, Fulton said. Farms in recent weeks have finished

harvesting corn silage and planting barley, cleared almond orchards of mummies, pushed out older orchards and prepped the ground for pre-plant fumigations, reported the National Agricultural Statistics Service in Sacramento.

But this month has begun to bear an unnerving resemblance to December 2013, which ended the driest calendar year in history in many areas and prompted Gov. Jerry Brown to declare a drought emergency the following month.

The nearly nonexistent precipitation during the last few weeks has put many areas well below their seasonal averages.

For instance, as of Dec. 26 Sacramento had only recorded 2.42 inches of rain for the water year that started Oct. 1, well below its normal 5.61 inches, according to the National Weather Service.

However, most reservoirs are still above their average levels so far this winter. Shasta Lake, the centerpiece

of the federal Central Valley Project, was holding 114 percent of its normal water supply for this time of year as of Dec. 26, the state Department of Water Resources reported.

The only exception is Lake Oroville, which has been drawn down intentionally to accommodate dam repairs. The lake was at 35 percent of capacity and 58 percent of normal for Dec. 26, according to the DWR’s California Data Exchange Center.

The dry spell comes amid signs of a weak La Nina atmospheric phenomenon, which favors chilly storms in the Pacific Northwest but can leave much of California dry. In the past 65 years, 60 percent of weak La Nina winters have been drier than normal in California, said Michelle Mead, a National Weather Service warning coordinator in Sacramento.

## Idaho ranks No. 2 in total irrigation withdrawals

By **SEAN ELLIS**  
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho, which ranks 39th nationally in population, ranks No. 2 in total irrigation withdrawals.

Six Idaho counties rank in the top 20 nationally for total irrigation use.

“We have an agricultural economy that is built on water,” said University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor, who compiled that data to show how important water is to Idaho farmers.

Agriculture is the top sector in the state’s economy, according to UI studies.

“Idaho is big in irrigation and agriculture is big in Idaho,” Taylor said.

The state ranks No. 5 in irrigated acres but rises to No. 2, behind California, when it comes to total irrigation withdrawals.

That’s because Southern Idaho, where most of the state’s 2.8 million irrigated acres are, is a desert and farmers there are heavily dependent on the state’s reservoir systems to grow their crops, said Lynn Tominaga, who is executive director of Idaho Ground Water Appropriators.

“Keep in mind those other states (with more irrigated acres) use irrigation as supplemental water because they get (more) rain,” he said. “They have more irrigated acres but they only use it when it doesn’t rain. We use it 24/7.”

Taylor said he compiled the data to show how important water is to the main driver of Idaho’s economy — agriculture — and no apologies should be made for the states’ farmers using so much water.

“That’s our competitive advantage; we have water here in the state,” he said. “Why not use it to produce food in Idaho? We’re using our water to create wealth and feed the world.”

Idaho Water Users Association Executive Director Paul Arrington incorporated some of Taylor’s water data into a position paper his organization put together to show how import-



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

A farm field near Nampa, Idaho, is irrigated in August. Data compiled by a University of Idaho agricultural economist shows that Idaho ranks No. 2 nationally in total irrigation withdrawals.

ant water is to the state. It will be given to the U.S. State Department to use in the upcoming Columbia River Treaty modernization negotiations.

Using Taylor’s data as well as information provided by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the position paper points out how important water is to four projects in the Snake River Basin: Boise, Palisades, Minidoka and Owyhee.

It shows that, combined, the projects provide irrigation water that is used to produce \$3.5 billion worth of crops and livestock.

“Water provides a significant economic impact in southern Idaho,” Arrington said, and if the treaty is altered in a way that requires changes in the operation of the Snake River system, “there could be significant consequences.”

Taylor found that 97 percent of water withdrawn in Idaho is used for agriculture, compared with 77 percent in California, 88 percent in Oregon and 68 percent in Washington.

He also found that total water withdrawals in Idaho, and around the West, have declined since the 1970s, as farmers have become more efficient in using it to grow their crops.

“There’s this big myth that we’re using more water. We aren’t,” he said.

## Lentil industry honors Newbry family

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Pacific Northwest Farmers Cooperative chief executive officer, president and treasurer Bill Newbry and his family are the 2018 Lentil Family of the Year.

The family represents the National Lentil Festival for the entire year, said director Britnee Packwood.

The award honors people within the industry who are elevating their profession, pushing for new innovations and leading the way for others, Packwood said. The Newbry family will join the festival and participate in its grand parade.

“I was very surprised and I am joining a great group of past honorees that includes both growers and processors,” Newbry told the Capital Press in an email. “A really great honor that I can share with my growers and staff and, without those people, this would not have happened.”

Newbry has been with the co-op since 1984, serving as CEO since 1996. He started the processing division for the co-op in 1986, and it grew to become one of the largest do-



Courtesy of USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council

Bill Newbry, chief executive officer of the Pacific Northwest Farmers Cooperative, receives the 2018 Lentil Family of the Year award from Dan McKinley, a Dayton, Wash., farmer and co-chairman of the Western Pulse Growers Association. Newbry was honored for his marketing skill and love for the industry, said Todd Scholz, vice president of research and member services for the USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council.

mestic and international suppliers of pulses, he said.

The co-op has 1,400 members, more than 50 facilities, three river barge terminals, a train-unit loading facility and numerous pulse processing plants and seed plants. The co-op is the result of a merger between Genesee Union Warehouse and Whitman County Grain Growers in 2008, and merged with Co-Ag in June 2017.

“The industry is kind of in a boom, and Bill had a big part of that,” said Todd Scholz, vice president of research and member services for the USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council. “His marketing skill and love for the industry is really what we’re recognizing.”

He credited Newbry with helping to create the co-op, and noted a particular chickpea variety, the Billy Bean, is named after Newbry.

## Wong Potatoes files for bankruptcy protection

Company founded in 1930, grows potatoes on nearly 5,000 acres

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

A company that grows, packs and ships potatoes in Oregon’s Klamath Basin has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, which protects busi-

nesses from creditors seizing collateral while the firm restructures debt.

In its bankruptcy filing, Wong Potatoes of Klamath Falls reports owing between \$1 million and \$10 million to fewer than 100 creditors. It reported assets between \$1 million and \$10 million.

Dan Chin, the company’s president, has also filed for bankruptcy with his wife but was out of the office and wasn’t available for comment.

The company, which was founded in 1930, produces 16 varieties of organic potatoes as well as several cultivars of conventional potatoes on nearly 5,000 acres. It employs between 50 and 100 workers, depending on the season.

U.S. Bankruptcy Court Judge Thomas Renn has approved a motion for Wong Potatoes to use cash collateral, and a meeting of creditors has been scheduled for Jan. 10 in Eugene, Ore.

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