

# Record year predicted for California almond crop

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

MODESTO, Calif. — The California almond industry is expecting a record 2.45 billion-pound crop this year, up 7.9 percent from the 2017 crop of 2.27 billion pounds.

The official industry crop forecast was released July 5 by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service. Careful management by farmers and newer orchards coming into production are responsible for the increase despite earlier concerns about freezing weather during bloom, said Holly King, chairwoman of the Almond Board of California and a Kern County grower.

"2018 looks to be a milestone year with over 1 million almond-bearing acres now in California," King said. It's not just more acres but growers continuing to find ways to grow more almonds per acre, she said.



Almond Board of California

A record California crop is forecast for this year. More than 1 million acres of trees are in production.

Harvest will start at the end of the month near Bakersfield, spread north into the Sacramento Valley in August and can finish in October, said Ashley Bloemhof, an Almond Board spokeswoman in Modesto.

As with tree fruit, almonds now face a 50 percent tariff in China in retaliation for U.S. tariffs on Chinese steel and

aluminum and other goods.

"It's too early to speculate on how these costs might affect the industry as a whole," Bloemhof said. "We don't want to lose any export business to China."

As of the end of May, 8.23 percent of California almonds, year-to-date, from the 2017 harvest had been shipped to China, she said, compared

to 7.18 percent the previous season. Of just exports in the 2016-2017 season, 10.58 percent went to China.

The forecast, known as the objective report, is based on actual counts of nuts on trees. It follows this year's May 10 preliminary, or subjective, report of 2.3 billion pounds based on early nut set.

The objective report says

the average nut set per tree is 5,677, down 0.6 percent from the 2017 almond crop.

The Nonpareil average nut set is 4,924, down 13.9 percent from last year's set. The average kernel weight for all varieties sampled was 1.54 grams, down 1.9 percent compared to the 2017 average weight of 1.57 grams.

More than 6,000 almond

growers and processors in California produce about 80 percent of the global supply. Demand continues to steadily grow as largely because of health benefits of almonds.

About 35 percent of California almonds go to North American markets, Western Europe is 26 percent and Asia and the Pacific are 25 percent.



Office of U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse

U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse, arms folded, listens to U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers at the U.S.-Mexico border near McAllen, Texas.

## Congressman visits border seeking facts on immigration

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

SUNNYSIDE, Wash. — A congressman from central Washington says he's more determined to work for immigration reform after visiting the U.S.-Mexico border near McAllen, Texas.

"After my tour, I am as determined as ever that border security and immigration reform must go hand-in-hand, which requires both sides of the debate to come to a legislative compromise," Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., said in a statement.

He visited a border wall and listened to briefings by U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement personnel.

Newhouse called the visit "eye-opening," and said he heard compelling stories about how hard federal officers work to enforce laws for the protection of Americans and immigrants.

"Not only do these enforcement professionals need more technology, infrastructure and personnel, but they need Congress to update our broken immigration system which currently

encourages illegal immigration," he said.

Every aspect needs to be addressed, from working with countries from which migrants leave to increasing border security to humane enforcement of laws, he said.

Newhouse and others in Congress are working toward a stand-alone vote before the August recess on related agricultural labor legislation.

The goal is to address legal work authorization for illegal immigrants working in the U.S., changes to or replacement of the H-2A-visa guestworker program and implementation of E-verify (electronic verification of employment eligibility).

## Tribal concerns may drive cattle off Colville allotment

### Forest Service has second thoughts

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

A northeast Washington rancher says it's a "miracle" that the U.S. Forest Service will reconsider taking away the allotment his family has grazed cattle on since 1963.

Steve Fountain of Pend Oreille County said Tuesday that he wasn't surprised that Colville National Forest Supervisor Rodney Smoldon announced that he was closing the 23,000-acre LeClerc Creek allotment.

Two days later, however, Regional Forester Jim Pena put Smoldon's decision on hold.

"I call it a miracle," Fountain said. "I had kind of given up. I'm way more hopeful now. The Forest Service has had me in a squeeze chute, only I'm not a cow, I'm a human."

The Forest Service has been studying for years whether to close the allotment, where Fountain turns out 101 cow-calf pairs for the summer. The agency acknowledges that Fountain's management of the herd has improved the ecological condition of the range, but Smoldon said the cattle are incompatible with tribal cultural practices.

The Kalispel Tribe of Indians told the Forest Service that

the land was sacred and that cow manure discouraged tribal members from practicing traditional beliefs, curative arts and rites of passage.

In an email to Forest Service employees, Smoldon said closing the allotment will re-establish the "full uses and values of this cherished cultural landscape for the Kalispel Tribe of Indians."

"This decision honors and respects the federal government's trust responsibility to the federally recognized Kalispel Tribe of Indians," Smoldon wrote.

The decision was announced in a legal notice June 26 but rescinded by higher-ups June 29. "We're taking some additional time to consider the impacts to parties involved. We plan to issue a decision as soon as possible," a Forest Service spokesman said in an email.

Efforts to reach the tribe were unsuccessful.

The Colville National Forest includes 1.1 million acres in Ferry, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties. Some 5,500 cow-calf pairs graze there in the summer. Cattlemen's

groups see the fate of the LeClerc Creek allotment as possibly setting a precedent for other grazing grounds.

"I would say every single grazing allotment could be put at risk," said Cattle Producers of Washington President Scott Nielsen. "That decision (to end grazing) would have had national implications."

Cattle have grazed there since at least 1940 and maybe as far back as the 1890s, according to the Forest Service.

The allotment has five pastures. Fountain said he was willing to give up one, making up 24 percent of the allotment. The Forest Service said closing the pasture would respond to tribal needs. "I've said all along I've been willing to make concessions for cultural concerns," Fountain said. "I don't see how we couldn't figure out a way to share the land."

The Forest Service released an extensive environmental study on the allotment in April. The study recommended that grazing continue, though with more than \$100,000 worth of new fences and water troughs to keep cattle from streams.

The Forest Service would pay for the improvements.

The Forest Service, in talks with Fountain, also worked out an alternative plan that would cost about \$73,000 in immediate improvements. Both plans are "ridiculously" expensive for taxpayers and unneeded for a range that's getting in better condition, Fountain said.

With either plan, the grazing permit would be contingent on an "adaptive management strategy" that could cost as much as \$500,000 over 10 years and reduce the number of cows allowed on the allotment, according to the study.

Smoldon said the Forest Service will offer Fountain a grazing permit on vacant allotments. Fountain and his family have a long history of grazing in the forest and have worked to minimize the ecological effects of grazing, Smoldon said.

Fountain said that the Forest Service has offered him allotments in a different county. "They're all in Ferry County. I live in Pend Oreille County. Do you want me to move?" he asked. "We also have a spiritual interest here."

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