



## Western water shortages impact what farmers plant

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN  
Capital Press

Widespread drought and water shortages in 2021 are impacting what farmers in the Western U.S. are planting.

Farmers across California and Oregon are making difficult decisions: tearing out acreage, replacing water-dependent crops with crops that can thrive on dryland and leaving land fallow. Rice, a water-dependent

crop, has been impacted. According to the California Farm Bureau Federation, rice farmers are planting fewer acres this year. Analysts say the state's rice acreage will likely be down 20% from average because

of water restrictions, driving up the price.

USDA estimated California will produce 471,000 rice acres this year, down 9% from 2020.

Industry leaders predict farmers will leave about

100,000 acres of rice ground idle this year.

Cranberries, like rice, need wet conditions to thrive and experts say this year's water shortages will impact cranberry producers' planting and harvesting decisions.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, Oregon's South Coast — a major cranberry-growing region — is already experiencing severe to exceptional drought.

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# The Hub

Small-scale producers plan a central go-to facility

By GEORGE PLAVERN  
Capital Press

ASTORIA, Ore. — The historic Mason, Ehrman & Co. building is perched along the Columbia River waterfront in downtown Astoria, Ore., flanked by shops and restaurants where tourists can watch passing cargo ships on their trans-Pacific journey.

Inside the mostly empty warehouse, Fred Johnson, an organic farmer from across the river in Naselle, Wash., chatted with the new owners of the building on a recent May afternoon about their plans to create a local food hub for the region's many small farmers, ranchers and fishers.

The Astoria Food Hub is an ambitious, multi-phase project that would promote the rich agricultural bounty of Oregon's North Coast. Plans include a cold storage, a commercial kitchen, retail stores, a distribution center and restaurant.



Jared Gardner

Johnson, a former restaurant owner and chef, was recently brought on as a consultant to the food hub, poring over blueprints and sharing ideas for the design. His experience gives him a unique perspective of both the needs of farmers, and intricacies of the food system.

"People want that kind of freshness, that kind of delivery," Johnson said. "It's just a question of how do producers come up with the infrastructure they need."

Phase I of the food hub is expected to be completed by September or October, said Jared Gardner, owner of the Nehalem River Ranch and a central partner in the project.

His team completed the purchase of the building in April, and is now recruiting tenants who share their vision for community-supported local agriculture.

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George Plaver/Capital Press

Partners in the Astoria Food Hub are, from left, Jared Gardner, Jason Stegner, Benjamin Ariff, Jessika Tantisook, Saidri Neth, Jennifer Lanus, Corey Ome and Jo Brown. In the back is Warren Neth with Bodhi and Zoe Neth.



George Plaver/Capital Press

The front of the Mason, Ehrman & Co. building facing Marine Drive in Astoria, Ore. It will include retail and office space for local farms and food nonprofits.

## Klamath Project irrigators say more drought relief needed

By GEORGE PLAVERN  
Capital Press

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. — As Klamath Project irrigators brace for a year with little to no water, farm groups are calling for additional funding to help communities weather the extreme drought and avoid economic devastation.

The unfolding crisis reached a crescendo on May 12 when the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation announced it would close the Project's A Canal for entire 2021 irrigation season.

Paul Simmons, executive director of the Klamath Water Users Association, said tensions are understand-

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ably high given the enormous stakes. His focus now is securing much-needed drought relief for 1,200 family farms and ranches to

survive.

"We need these dollars to help get us through this year," Simmons said. "We're really focused on exploring every possible venue where someone could obtain that relief."

Reclamation has said it will provide \$15 million for agricultural producers through the Klamath Project

Drought Response Agency, along with \$3 million in technical assistance for local tribes to benefit endangered fish.

But Simmons said much more is needed to rescue irrigators facing an unprecedented and dire situation.

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