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Almond Status – *posted April 18, 2016 by Christi Heintz*

When the 2015 crop was determined to be a larger crop than predicted, and when the almond market found itself adjusting to an increased supply, almond prices dropped to levels not seen for the past three years. The almond industry continues to aggressively build demand for what appears to be just less than a 1.9 billion lb crop. Amazing that our honey bees can produce 1.9 billion lbs of almonds! Honey bees have now finished pollinating the 2016 almond crop. Don't think almond growers are not appreciative! Not only are growers now more intimately involved with bees and planting additional forage for them, but the Almond Board foots the bill for a considerable amount of honey bee research. For the Bee-Informed Partnership, the Almond Board and PAm are helping to fund a commercial BMP guide for beekeepers and support BIP's tech teams. The Almond Board is helping pay for pesticide analyses to better explain the relationship between potential pesticide exposure and bee declines during almond pollination season. Nuts are maturing quickly with the warm 2016 Spring. There have been reports of some small nuts not maturing at all, however. Possibly due to lack of fertilization caused by a short bloom. As usual, time will tell, with the subjective forecast for the 2016 almond crop being announced this coming May 10th.

Almond Status – *posted January 28, 2015 by Christi Heintz*

The 2015 crop may come in at about 1.9 billion pounds, more than initially anticipated, due to the rapid fall harvest and lower-than-average shipments to date. Uncertainties in the market have led to price fluctuations and lack of confidence by buyers. Prices have not held, but have declined over the months. With bloom right around the corner, there is much anticipation in the air! Will there be enough bees for the MILLION acres of almonds in California? We think so. Beekeepers have been working ever since the end of last year's pollination season to build bees for the 2016 pollination season. Beekeepers are spending millions on supplemental feed to bring strong bees to California. And what about El Niño? There's been ample rain and a good snowpack in the Sierra's to help relieve the prolonged California drought. Orchards have received much-needed rain and the snowpack will be water storage for the coming months. Now, we simply await bloom-time weather that lends itself to good flower pollination. We need enough breaks between rain events for adequate bee flight hours. Most colonies are in place with bees ready to do the job they do so well.

Almond Status – *posted November 11, 2015 by Christi Heintz*

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) forecast is for a 1.8 billion pound almond crop for 2015. Industry prediction is for a lower crop total, around 1.75 billion pounds. The major factor in the decreased supply is the four-year California drought. Returns have been good for almond growers, with Blue Diamond Growers recently reporting the highest per pound payment made in its long history. Significant early sales of this crop have been awaiting the settling down of various marketing variables. Domestic shipments having been holding steady, with international shipments declining compared to a year ago, especially for the Middle East, India and China. Factors affecting the market that seasoned buyers are currently evaluating include: 1) US and foreign demand for almonds, 2) improved data on the 2015 almond crop supply, and 3) if and when the predicted El Niño will relieve the prolonged drought.

Almond Status – posted September 15, 2015 by Christi Heintz

The final numbers for 2014 are in, and the 2014 almond crop weighed in at 1.87 billion pounds. This crop was down 7% from the previous year's crop. Compared to the NASS Objective Estimate, the crop was off by 11%. California's drought has impacted yields with the 2015 crop projected to be 1.8 billion pounds according to NASS. Considering inventory and a smaller crop, almond supply is projected to be 2-5% off the previous year. Buyers are not quick to commit, trying to decide between short-term and long-term options and facing \$1.00/lb price increases.

Currently, California is talking about a monster El Niño forming in the Pacific that could possibly turn the four-year drought around. Many questions remain: Will it really be a significant El Niño year? Just how big and where? After four years of stressed almond trees, what will it take to bring them back to optimum health and production? Will precipitation be at the right time to help trees and not hinder pollination or facilitate disease in the young crop? We'll see what Mother Nature brings almond growers and beekeepers this coming year!

Almond Status – posted May 28, 2015 by Tara McCall

According to the 2015 Almond Forecast released by NASS on May 5, 2015, the 2015 crop is forecast at 1.85 billion pounds, down slightly from 2014, and 890,000 bearing acres, up slightly from 2014. The 2014 almond crop resulted in 1.87 billion pounds, down from 2013's almond production. The 2014 almond crop set a record monetary high at almost a \$6.5 billion. (http://www.almonds.com/sites/default/files/content/attachments/2015_ca_almond_subjective_forecast.pdf)

CA produces almost 80% of all almonds in the world. Only 25-30% of almonds grown in CA stayed in the U.S.; the rest was exported to other countries.

Crop development was ahead of schedule and led to an earlier crop than previous years. Pests and diseases were reportedly low, but higher than 2014. Water conditions topped the list of concerns.

Current reservoir conditions are well below average, approximately 50% below average in many of the reservoirs. (<http://cdec.water.ca.gov/cgi-progs/products/rescond.pdf>)

There is a new available resource, through the Almond Board of California and UC Davis, called "Drought Management for California Almonds," which details strategies for drought management irrigation and reduced water considerations. (<http://www.almonds.com/newsletters/outlook/new-drought-management-publication#sthash.0Ss2iVho.dpuf>)

Posted September 2, 2014 by Dan Cummings

The 2013 almond crop was forecast by NASS at 1.85 billion pounds and came in slightly over 2 billion pounds. 2014 will likely be the opposite with a NASS forecast of 2.1 billion pounds and a crop that is coming in light up and down the state.

Shipments of the 2013 crop achieved a new record of 1.937 billion pounds, up 3.8% over last year, and all the more impressive occurring in the face of ever rising prices. 33% of the crop was consumed domestically while 41% of exports were destined for Western Europe, an increase of 14% over last year. Spain led the way with an increase of 22%. The Middle East also showed a nice increase over last year, up 19%. More price sensitive markets like China and India accounted for the bulk of decreases, down 30% and 18% respectively. The 2013 crop year Almond Industry Position Report ending July 31 can be found at http://www.almonds.com/sites/default/files/content/newsletters/attachments/2014.07posrpt.pdf_1.pdf.

Almond orchards in California made it through the summer and continuing drought better than most anticipated last spring. However, the situation is very serious. Reservoirs are at very low levels, with Shasta and Oroville at 29% and 31% of capacity <http://cdec.water.ca.gov/cgi-progs/products/floodcontrol.pdf>. Groundwater levels have continued to decline, and at accelerating rates in many areas. Ground water pumping regulations will be forthcoming with 3 related bills before the Governor at present. Most orchards show some sign of deficit irrigation, and salt accumulation, with significant acreage in very ragged condition. It is widely expected the potential for next year's crop has been impacted significantly.

Meanwhile and incredulously, new almond plantings continue to expand. None have great confidence in the published acreage numbers, e.g. constant revisions upwards in subsequent years. Orchard removals accelerated by lack of water make the task even more difficult.

The Almond Nursery Sales Report did little to resolve this with two of the largest nurseries in California not participating and no consideration given to the significant number of trees being produced by almond grower's for their own use. Two reasonable observations are that the rate of increase in new plantings is less as a percentage of bearing acres than what occurred in the mid-2000's and a very significant percentage of new acreage is the self-fertile Independence variety and to a much lesser extent other self-fertile varieties. It is important to note that self-fertile does not mean self-pollinating but fewer bees are needed to set a crop.

Almond prices started the 2014 season 60 to 70 cents higher than last year and are increasing. Harvest started several days earlier than last year and is moving very quickly. There has been little lull between the completion of Nonpareil harvest and continuation into pollenizers. Harvest should be completed very early this fall!

Kernels are small but still larger than last year's, kernel moisture levels are also down again from "normal." Nonpareil yields are generally down across the state, this was expected after last year's record crop, but not to the degree being experienced, 10% to 40% decreases. Growers were hopeful that pollenizer crops would help offset the disappointing yields but this has not proven to be the case. Nons are selling for ~ \$3.75 per pound to the Grower, Carmels and Cals at \$ 3.40 per pound.

Posted April 28, 2014 by Dan Cummings

2013 almond crop receipts ended up right at 2 billion pounds, second only to the 2011 crop of 2.030 billion pounds. Nonpareil carried the day with a new record of over 800 million pounds, more than 40% of the total. Kernels were smaller than any previous crop and again drier than normal as California's drought continues. Crop quality was excellent with the feared Navel Orange Worm pressure never fully developing.

Shipments 8 months into the season are 4% ahead of last year at 1.37 billion pounds compared to 1.317 billion pounds in 2013. There is little change in carryout at this season's end compared to last year at approximately a 9 week supply. Price sensitive markets have shown declines relative to last year's shipments; China down 31% and India down 25% YTD. Western Europe is up 20% after a weak Spanish crop (off approximately 40 million pounds), and the Middle East recovering, up 17% YTD.

The 2014 almond bloom started off a week to 10 days early and was generally excellent. There was good overlap of varieties promoting strong cross pollination. Recorded bee flight hours were some of the best in the last decade and comparable to 2006. Peak bloom held on strongly and the only hiccup was a rain event mid-way through the Butte/Padre bloom. The crop is maturing ahead of normal with likely another year of small kernels resulting from the rapid development of kernels. There were no frost events but some isolated losses from hail damage, ironic in the midst of a severe drought!

The 2013 California Almond Acreage Report was released this past week with an estimate of 860,000 bearing acres in 2014. http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/California/Publications/

[Fruits_and_Nuts/201405almac.pdf](#) 2013 bearing acreage was revised upward from last year's estimate of 810,000 acres to 840,000 acres. This surprised many but also helped explain the 860,000 bearing acres estimate for 2014. It's always perplexed me that the reports year of planting and variety acreage exhibits don't match the executive summary acreage statements. Something to do with the limitations of collecting field data, so don't question yourself if you make the same observation while reading through the document.

The wild card for the industry, with otherwise a remarkable combination of increasing production and resilient markets absorbing large crops at good prices.... is WATER! The U.S. drought monitor describes the entire almond growing regions of California as being in either Extreme Drought or Exceptional Drought <http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/Home/RegionalDroughtMonitor.aspx?west>. Reservoir levels are at best 50% of capacity <http://cdec.water.ca.gov/cgi-progs/products/rescond.pdf>.

Pumping water levels for wells have not recovered this winter and will be hard pressed to make up for dramatic reductions in water district allocations. A mature almond orchard thrives at 45 to 55 inches of water, including rainfall. This year's rainfall is roughly half of the long term average requiring growers to make up the shortfall with even more irrigation water throughout the winter. Well drillers are booked more than a year out and some growers are removing orchards for lack of water. http://www.mercurynews.com/drought/ci_25447586/california-drought-san-joaquin-valley-sinking-farmers-race

Water has already sold for as much as \$2,300 per acre foot (enough water to cover an acre 12 inches deep). Growers are signing water transfer contracts that require pre-payment and state in the contract that if no water is delivered there will be no refund! It is such an unprecedented state of affairs that water agencies are also requiring growers receiving transfer water to assume the full cost of any litigation that may result. Lack of water will take a toll on this year's crop, some estimating a reduction of 10% or 200 million pounds, and quite potentially an even bigger impact on future crops. Deficit irrigation strategies for almonds have little impact on the current crop but compromise considerably the trees ability to set a crop the following year.

There is hope for a break in the drought conditions this coming year with conditions supporting an El Nino winter rainfall pattern seeming to come into place. <http://www.wunderground.com/blog/JeffMasters/an-el-nio-coming-in-2014>. This would be a welcome, if short lived, reprieve from the current drought conditions. California must plan for its current and future water needs but mustering the political consensus, navigating environmental impacts for storage construction, the growing urban population, endangered species, etc. make this a tall task and one sure to take a long time in coming.

Posted January 31, 2014 by Dan Cummings

The 2013 California almond crop should come close to two billion pounds as the final receipts are tallied. The Nonpareil crop had been expected to be a little off with heavy production expected from pollinizers. However, Nonpareil carried the day in the end with 40% of all receipts and very near a new absolute tonnage record at over 750 million pounds. Kernels were abnormally dry again this year likely reflecting continued drought conditions in California. Quality was excellent with little of the anticipated navel orange worm pressure materializing. Kernel sizes were very small with abnormally warm springtime temperatures likely the culprit. This hypothesis is advanced by University of California Cooperative Extension nut crop pomology advisor David Doll at The Almond Doctor ([click here](#)).

Shipments for the first 5 months of the season were a record 910 million pounds. The US market has remained very resilient to rising prices with shipment records four of the last five months. The Chinese

and Indian markets have not fared so well with these countries being more price sensitive and recording reductions in shipments year-to-date respectively down 25% and 26% relative to last year. The Middle East has come roaring back up 39% year-to-date with increasing stability in the region. Shipments to Europe are up 25% with almost half of this increase coming from Spain as that country sources raw manufacturing product from California after their short crop off ~ 40 million pounds. Prices to California growers for medium sized almonds at present are \$3.10/pound for the broad pollinizer classification of “California”, \$3.30/pound for Carmel/Monterrey and \$3.60 and up for Nonpareil.

Recent (end of November) competing nut prices were as follows;

Walnuts- Chandler light halves and pieces	\$ 5.15
Pistachios- Whole 80% raw kernels	\$ 10.50
Pecans- Shelled	\$ 5.95
Cashews- 320”s	\$ 3.50
Brazil Nuts	\$ 3.50
Hazelnuts- Large Barcelona	\$ 4.40

The big news in California for the coming season is, of course, the drought. This is the driest it has been in California since 1884 with the snowpack down 84% from normal. A drought State of Emergency was officially declared January 17th of this year. Various water districts have advised customers of water deliveries ranging from 22 to 0 inches this season. Almond trees do best at 50 plus inches of water including rainfall and depending on canopy and crop load. Less than three inches of rainfall have been received in most growing regions this winter and little is promised in current weather forecasts. Most reservoir levels are pitiful with the two largest, Lake Oroville and Shasta Reservoir in the north, at roughly one third of capacity and half of historical average for this date. Folsom Lake is just 17% of capacity!!

More information on the state of California’s drought and water conditions can be found at the [California Department of Water Resources Data Exchange Center](#). To view a graph of California’s major reservoirs [click here](#).

Growers have long been amazingly creative at sourcing water for perennial crops and again this year there is little talk of accelerating orchard removals or canceling bee contracts in anticipation of running out of water. This is especially true because of the high value of nut crops. What may be different from past drought experiences is the pressure on ground water. Well yields and pumping water levels have been declining through the winter! Most growers started modest irrigation schedules in December with the intent of mimicking normal rainfall and recharging soil moisture profiles. Another concern is water quality typically deteriorates with poor aquifer recharge and salts have already been accumulating in soils with the lack of leaching rainfall.

This will be one of the earliest almond blooms ever if we continue on the current trajectory. The earliest blooming varieties, e.g. Sonora, are at 5%+ full bloom this last day of January on the west side of the Sacramento and southern San Joaquin Valleys. Typically, the earlier the bloom the poorer the overlap of bloom across varieties. With almonds not being self-fertile and requiring cross pollination, overlap of bloom expression is a critical determinant of resulting crop size. Frost is another concern with the early bloom increasing the window of vulnerability, and especially moving up in the calendar the point of jacket (sepals) shedding and the small nut stage into potentially late March. Finally, the same conditions that lead to drought conditions also favor cold nights and frost. Almond growers are bracing themselves for what indeed could be a very long growing season.

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