



The Outlook

March 9, 2009

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Crop Outlook

A high pressure ridge out west will bring a gradual warm up to California following weeks of wet, stormy weather. The badly needed precipitation has been a welcome relief for the drought situation however California remains behind in annual precipitation and snowpack. Harvest disruptions have been minimal during the wet February with strawberry and asparagus production affected most. Seasonal temperatures in the 60s to low 70s are expected to return to Central and Southern California. Temperatures in the 70s to low 80s are forecast for the desert regions this week, a welcome cool down from last weeks excessive (90s) heat.

While precipitation is desperately needed in California the extended wet cycle this February has limited plantings and field prep work somewhat along with slowing growth rates in the cool temperatures. This may affect (lessen) transitional and spring supplies set to begin around April. Water restrictions in the San Joaquin Valley have caused a reduction of transitional acreage in the Huron region by approximately 50% this year. Desert area growers will attempt to prolong their season to fill the gap. This is risky as desert temperatures can quickly become too hot to produce quality crops. The inclement weather conditions in February have impacted growth rates of upcoming crops in the Salinas region. All these factors will contribute to likely supply shortages as we move toward spring production.

Desert area leaf and lettuce growers remain ahead of schedule in many fields as we approach the transition (mid-March to mid-April) season. Hot temperatures (80s to low 90s) last week have given way to seasonal temperatures (70s to low 80s) this week. These previous hot temperatures have caused some heat stress and mildew issues in leaf and lettuce stands. You can expect to see an increase in sun discoloration, fringe burn, tip burn and growth crack in iceberg lettuce supplies. Romaine and leaf supplies will also see an increase in fringe burn, internal burn and mildew along with the persistent light epidermal peel. As growers attempt to prolong the desert season into April hot temperatures become a real threat to yields and quality. With warm temperatures likely to continue in March seeders may also become problematic, further reducing yields from this region as the season winds down. Growers have planted early stands in the Salinas and Santa Maria Valleys in anticipation of bypassing the transition region this year. We will have to see how these early stands progress over the next several weeks but with desert supplies ahead of schedule and less transition acreage shortages remain likely. As the weather warms across the U.S. upcoming demand will play a major role as to overall supplies and potential gaps.

Broccoli and cauliflower production are in decent shape with numerous regions (CA, AZ, MX) in production or set to begin. The warm temperatures in the desert areas will impact quality (bolting, flowering spread in broccoli and sun discoloration in cauliflower) and keep fields ahead of schedule. Celery is in a similar position with numerous regions in production out west and Florida in full swing.

Strawberry production from Southern California will increase seasonally following weeks of inclement weather. Supplies and quality will be on the rise in the improved weather pattern. Santa Maria has begun very light production and will begin to increase seasonally.



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Supplies from Florida are expected to wind down around late-March after one more volume push. Production from Baja and Central Mexico are in the latter stages of their season, winding down over the next several weeks.

Blueberry supplies will remain very light as off shore (Chile) production winds down a bit early due to adverse growing conditions this season. Chilean production is expected to finish up around mid-March. Domestic production from Southern California has been delayed by the recent cool wet conditions this February. Production should begin to increase in the near future as the weather improves in March. Domestic production from the east (Florida, Georgia) has taken a hit in the recent freezing temperatures with a 30-40% loss reported. This was the third freeze event in these regions this season. Most of the damage reported was done to the early crop which runs from mid-April to mid-May with only a 10% loss reported in the summer crop harvested in June and early July.