



The Outlook

September 21, 2009

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CROP OUTLOOK

Hot temperatures are once again forecast to impact California this week as a high pressure system moves into the western states today. Temperatures in the 80s along the coast to the high 90s inland are expected through the week, with triple digit temperatures likely in the warmest areas. Record high temperatures are a possibility this week throughout the state, especially in the interior regions.

As harvests continue, the Salinas Valley is experiencing typical summertime supply fluctuations with the current heat wave increasing heat related problems in the fields. These hot temperatures and associated warm nights have also increased mold and mildew problems along with insect populations. While insect damage itself is rarely a major factor (other than bugs in the box) as insects feed and multiply they leave lesions that allow various diseases or pathogens an entrance into the plant, affecting yields and quality. The Salinas Valley received very little rainfall this year and contains numerous micro climates and soil types allowing for a wide range of growing conditions. Another factor currently is that fields are on their final/last rotation/planting of the season leaving the soil a little tired and crops being grown more susceptible to disease and quality issues. During the fall, lettuce harvests move inland away from the coast to the warmer southern growing regions of the Salinas Valley. These factors combine to make it difficult for growers to control mold, mildews, insects, heat defects and other quality issues, reminding us of the difficulty of producing high quality row crops in the late summer and fall. Current quality issues, typical of late summer production and excessive heat include, hollow core, bolting (irregular curd or crown) and sun discoloration in broccoli and cauliflower along with mildew, fringe burn, sun discoloration, weak tip and internal burn in lettuce and leaf stands. Lesser texture and shelf life look to be the norm for the short term following the hot temperatures.

Strawberry stands in the Salinas /Watsonville region are showing their age with recent hot days and warm overnight temperatures. These growing conditions tend to produce soft, overripe, tender fruit that is difficult to handle and pack. Growers are currently culling a significant amount of fruit due to over maturity keeping yields low. We expect to continue to see a wide range in quality along with smaller sized fruit and increased bronzing, bruise and bleeders in the pack-out. Stem supplies will remain very light for the near term as harvests continue in these older fields. Improved stem supplies are expected when new crop supplies from Oxnard begin in earnest around early October

Lettuce, romaine and leaf production will take a hit as insect pressure, mildew, fringe burn and heat related issues impact yields. Many stands are showing some mildew and burn as insect populations increase drastically in the warm temperatures. As regional supplies dwindle and schools begin increased demand may keep these supplies light for the near term. Lighter supplies, lesser texture, shelf life and overall quality is expected as growers work through current acreage. Spinach production remains susceptible to mildew pressure in the expected weather pattern as supplies look to remain light for the near term.

Another concern is the young seedlings and transplants in the southern growing regions set for fall harvests and the tender spinach and spring mix ingredients that are susceptible to extreme temperatures. Heat related issues will certainly rise as yields, texture, shelf life and overall quality will decline for the short term at a minimum. Field evaluation continues as stands are spread out throughout the Salinas Valley. Upcoming weather patterns will play a crucial role as to yields and quality as we move toward fall harvests.