

# Valley farmers benefit from timing of rain

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**By Tracy Correa**  
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Growers say the rains and floods that have seeped into nearby low-lying areas have not yet posed a significant threat to Valley farmland.

However, if coupled with continued heavy rains, the situation could change.

Several rainy days have already forced citrus growers to delay picking tree fruit. The rain also is creating soggy, damp fields that must dry out before farmers can complete post-harvest jobs such as plow-down.

"Most of the crops are dormant right now, so the timing couldn't have been better," said Robert Rolan, Madera County agriculture commissioner.

Farmers in other areas of the state are being flooded out completely, so the Valley has been fortunate, he said.

Flooding in Northern California has so far mostly caused delays in harvesting, and officials predict most crops will survive.

"Unless a farmer is experiencing localized flooding, this is probably not a big concern," said Shawn Stevenson, immediate past president of the Fresno County Farm Bureau.

California Farm Bureau officials say that overall, state crop damage has been minimal:

■ **Grapes and fruit/nut trees:** Grapevines and deciduous fruit and nut trees withstand heavy rains and flooding well this time of year. Trees and vines are dormant. Problems will come with cleanup.

■ **Citrus:** Rains have caused some harvesting delays and potential minor crop-disease problems for Central California orange growers.

■ **Milk:** Some dairy farms have been flooded, with disruption to milk production that could last several months. Some milking barns were flooded; equipment may be damaged, and the milking facilities cannot reopen until cleared by local county health departments.

■ **Vegetable crops:** Rains have slowed the planting of lettuces, broccoli and cauliflower along the Central Coast.

■ **Wheat:** Officials worry about 150,000 acres of winter wheat planted in the Central Valley from Glenn County south to Stanislaus County damaged by floods and standing water.

■ **Pasture:** Flooded pasture may be damaged if not drained for several days. Most grasses

## Minimizing flood damage

The National Association of Independent Insurers advises property owners to take the following steps to help minimize damage to property involved in flooding:

■ Shovel or scrape mud off the walls, floors and furniture and then hose the rooms from the ceiling down before the mud dries.

■ Use a diluted chlorine bleach mixture to clean household items, appliances, walls and floors. This helps control odors.

■ Flooded basements should be pumped gradually, about one-third of the water a day.

■ Major appliances, such as refrigerators and stoves, can be washed and dried completely. In most cases, they will not be damaged unless they were operating at the time they became immersed. Note that fixtures often hold water. They should be inspected and allowed to dry thoroughly before using.

■ Food utensils and equipment should be thoroughly washed and sterilized before using. However, any food that was open and exposed to floodwaters should be thrown out.

■ Mildew can be removed from dry wood with a solution of four to six tablespoons of trisodium phosphate (TSP), one cup of liquid chlorine bleach and one gallon of water.

■ Disinfect or throw out all items exposed to sewage.

■ Wood furniture should be dried outdoors but not in direct sunlight. Remove drawers and other moving parts before the item dries.

■ Professional restoration, cleaning and salvage companies can provide additional assistance. Many will offer free advice. If the damaged property is covered by flood insurance, the insurance adjuster is another good source of information.

are hardy but can be hurt if oxygen is cut off for too long. Flooding will also damage fences.

■ **Artichokes:** Rains in mid-December reduced artichoke yields along the Central Coast by 20 percent. The recent rains could damage the plants themselves. Artichokes are perennials that stay in fields up to 20 years.