PACIFIC COAST FARMERS' MARKET ASSOCIATION

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CA NUT FARMERS HANGING ON IN DROUGHT

Driving down California's Interstate 5, halfway to Los Angeles, you'll see small pockets of almond trees ripped from the ground. It's a heart-wrenching sight. Being a California nut farmer is a risky business these days. Drought, early spring frost, supply chain issues, higher costs, and economic uncertainty have been weighing on the minds of California nut growers for the last several years.

Though there is strong demand for pistachios, almonds, and walnuts, some farmers are still having to tear out older trees to redirect their water resources to younger trees in the orchard. But other, more optimistic, farmers are planting more trees, hoping to increase their smaller crop yields.

With no surface water, farmers have had to depend on well water, sometimes having to dig deeper wells to get to ground water. Small farmers have been hit the hardest because they don't have the resources that larger industrial nut farms do. They can't afford to dig deeper wells to find water, put in large water conservation systems, or even have the time to wait out the drought.

When asked about his thoughts on this precious resource, Guy Allard of Allard Farms in Westley, CA said, "Access to water depends a lot on location. My ranch and the one across the road could have totally different water resources as well as different water districts. Some have well water, some don't. The water quality differs, too."

Access to water and the future of the nut industry will be “inextricably tied to the state’s Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). The state required Groundwater Management Areas (GMAs) to submit sustainability plans this year. However, several GMAs have found their respective regions have sustainable yields that are too low to provide adequate amounts for farming — largely because they simply don’t have enough access to water.” Allard stated that “no matter how much we conserve, water continue to be one of the biggest issues in farming. There will never be enough to go around.”

We all enjoy pistachios, almonds, and walnuts, but we need a reminder that nut farming – and farming in general - is a precarious occupation with ever-changing variables for crop success. As winter approaches, nut growers hope that rain returns in a quantity that fills ground water reservoirs and wells, and provides enough surface water for all. Even if there is abundant rain this winter, California will always have an issue with having enough water to go around. Please conserve where you can, so your farmers have enough water to grow the food you eat.

TAGS

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