Tulare County Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer

Gary Kunkel, Agricultural Commissioner
Sealer of Weights and Measures
William R. Appleby, Assistant Commissioner/Sealer

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Alfred Montna
Board President
California Board of Food and Agriculture
CDFA Executive Office
1220 N Street, Rm. 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Mr. Montna,

Since the summer of 2008, our Board of Supervisors has continued to call attention to the accumulated impact of several years of drought by reaffirming a local declaration. In March, the unemployment rate in Tulare County reached 17.7 percent, up from a revised figure of 16.9 percent in February. While the March figure is higher than the overall unadjusted unemployment rate of 11.5 percent for California, the increase is not primarily due to a loss of agricultural-related jobs caused by drought. In fact, the preliminary *Total Farm employment figure*[1] for March 2009 has increased by 1,200 jobs from the same time last year, for a total of 29,300 jobs. Sectors hardest hit by the downturn in the local economy include construction, manufacturing, professional and business services.

Because of late-season storm systems this year, our county is just slightly below normal in terms of both rainfall and snow pack. That being said, the cumulative drought effect has caused an estimated 35 percent loss to 615,000 acres of rangeland forage, or $3.3 million dollars. Last summer, many of our ranchers were forced to either sell cattle or feed supplemental forage. Since runoff will be at a minimum this year, cattlemen may face a similar situation as temperatures rise.

It appears that grower deliveries from more than twenty irrigation districts will range from 60 to 100 percent of normal. Some western Tulare County growers may lose one or two alfalfa cuttings due to the possibility of shortened water allocations. Growers who rely on wells for their irrigation needs are finding that water tables have fallen. Some have been forced to drill deeper wells or to install a higher-horsepower pump to obtain the amount of water needed. Electricity and well costs are a major concern, as is the need to recharge our underground water storage system. Growers here are very worried about the man-made water shortage (often described as a "regulatory drought") that has been influenced by environmental groups. Tree and vine farmers have not yet been forced make any decisions as to what to plant or disc under. In contrast, we have seen several fields of dryland wheat produced this season, which is only possible because of the rains this winter.

Thank you,

Gary Kunkel
Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer

By Marilyn Kinoshita, Deputy Comm/Sealer

[1]State of California EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Labor Market Information Division

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