

California farmers must learn to cope with changing climate

By Suzanne Bohan, Contra Costa Times

SACRAMENTO – The succulent cherries and juicy ripe peaches that Californians enjoy every summer could disappear in some regions as climate change warms the cold winters that trees need to bear fruit in the spring.

In the past century, the state's winter lows have warmed by 2 degrees Fahrenheit, "a significant increase," one expert told a forum last week.

Although that warming trend hasn't yet disrupted crops, it is accelerating, Dan Sumner, director of the Agricultural Issues Center at UC Davis, told the Sacramento gathering.

"There's potential for complete crop failure, especially cherries, apricots and other stone fruit," said Louise Jackson, a UC Davis researcher. As an example, Sumner said that as winters heat up, peach growers in the warmer southern San Joaquin Valley may have to move northward, where it's cooler.

The forum drew experts in agricultural and climate science, and water and pest management with concerns over extreme weather's threat to California's rich agricultural heartland.

California farmers grow more produce than any other state, supplying half of domestic fruits and vegetables, and almost all the almonds, apricots, raisins, grapes, olives and pistachios. California ranchers are among the leading livestock producers.

But California's fast-changing climate will challenge farmers' resiliency. Climate models predict global temperature

increases from 2 to 11.5 degrees by 2100, depending on heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions.

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