

Drought reduces California harvest

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

It's harvest time in much of California, and the signs of drought are almost as abundant as the fruits and nuts and vegetables.

One commodity after another is feeling the impact of the state's epic water shortage. The great Sacramento Valley rice crop, served in sushi restaurants nationwide and exported to Asia, will be smaller than usual. Fewer grapes will be available to produce California's world-class wines, and the citrus groves of the San Joaquin Valley are producing fewer oranges. There is less hay and corn for the state's dairy cows, and the pistachio harvest is expected to shrink.

While many crops have yet to be harvested, it's clear that the drought has carved a significant hole in the economy of rural California. Farm income is down, so is employment, and Thursday's rain showers did little to change the equation.

An estimated 420,000 acres of farmland went unplanted this year, or about 5 percent of the total. Economists at UC Davis say agriculture, which has been a \$44 billion-a-year business in California, will suffer revenue losses and higher water costs – a financial hit totaling \$2.2 billion this year.

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