

# Record tomato crop in California

By Michael B. Marois, Bloomberg

California farmers who grow a third of the world's processing tomatoes, the kind used for pasta sauce and soups, nurtured a record crop this year even as the state's drought damped production of other vegetables.

An estimated 14 million tons of processing tomatoes were harvested in California this year, the most ever and up 16 percent from last year, according to the California Tomato Growers Association, a trade group for the \$1 billion-a-year industry. Canneries such as Campbell Soup Co. paid \$83 a ton, also the most ever.

"The price was at a point where guys felt they could take the water risk and put their limited water supplies on tomatoes instead of other crops," said farmer Aaron Barcellos, whose family grows tomatoes and other crops on 7,000 acres about 110 miles south of Sacramento. "Processors needed to pay a price that would get the acreage in the ground."

With 82 percent of California suffering from extreme drought after three years with record low rain and snow, the water distribution system is rationing supplies to the nation's most productive agricultural region. Growers have been forced to drill wells, sapping already depleted groundwater. The dry spell is likely to boost food prices nationwide as farmers leave some land unplanted because they can't irrigate, according to the U.S. Agriculture Department.

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