

Abundant almond crop in California

ALMOND HARVEST HAS STARTED IN CALIFORNIA AND IT LOOKS LIKE IT COULD TURN OUT TO BE THE LARGEST CROP EVER WITH 1.5BN POUNDS



+ *Prunus dulcis* or *Prunus amygdalus* is a species belonging to the subfamily Prunoideae of the family Rosaceae. The almond tree is grown mainly in the US, around the Mediterranean Sea, in Australia, Pakistan and Iran. The seeds of the almond tree are almonds and there are sweet and bitter varieties. Later ones contain amygdalin, a cyanide-containing glycoside, which forbids to eat raw bitter almonds. California produces more than 80% of the worldwide sweet almond crop and virtually 100% of the domestic supply. About 80% of the crop is exported into about 90 countries. For this year, the US National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) estimates an almond production of about 1.5bn pounds. This would amount to an increase of almost 7% when compared to last year. This will increase the total supply by 8.28%. From August (beginning of the harvest) to the end of September, 164m pounds of almonds (shelled and inshell) have already been exported. This is 10% more than in September 2007. The exports to Eastern Europe have almost doubled to 7.2m pounds (+ 91%)

while the exports to Western Europe have remained on almost the same level (75.5m pounds). The average nut set per tree this year is 7,452 which is 1% above that of last year. However, the Nonpareil average nut set is 7,079 and thus has not changed when compared to 2007. The average kernel weight for all varieties sampled was 1.43 g, 3% below last year.

The larger crop will probably contribute to preventing almond prices from soaring, although the American almond growers are struggling with higher costs for the colonies of bees needed for pollinating, for fertilizers and last but not least for transportation. Additional costs have also arisen due to the pasteurization of almonds which has been a stipulation since September of this year in order to exclude contamination with pathogens. In the past, outbreaks of Salmonellosis have been related to the consumption of almonds worldwide. The Californian almond growers welcome the advances in product safety but they also recognize the risk of

suffering from a competitive disadvantage compared to other cultivation regions.

A rather medium- to long-term problem might be the increasing number of drought periods in the Pacific Coast state. At the University of California, Ken Shackel, Professor of Plant Science, is researching ideas for drought water management solutions in order to control the irrigation of almond trees in a way that the plants always have the amount of water they need. Almond trees need more water at the time just before the harvest. For the past two years, the rainfall in the West of the US has been considerably lower than the average quantities measured before. This has resulted in the rationing of water for agricultural use in some regions. In this context, the increasing significance of environmental protection measures also plays a role. Last August, the removal of water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin river delta was limited to 40% of the quantity initially agreed upon in order to protect the fish living in these waters. This means that the almond trees in this region are quite thirsty. +++



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