

# California FARMER

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## Almond fizzle?

By **LEN RICHARDSON**

**A**LMOND markets have sizzled in recent years, pulling new acreage into production. (See August 2006 cover story at *www.CaliforniaFarmer.com* under "Magazine Online.") But the almond industry may be at a fork in the marketing road as the water crisis is poised to slash almond acreage and potentially send hard-earned global and domestic market growth plunging in 2009.

"The current drought, along with legal wrangles over endangered species, has also caused concern for thousands of acres of farmland on the west side of both the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys," reports Blue Diamond Growers, Sacramento, the state's largest almond processor.

"In the mix of land in jeopardy are over 250,000 acres of almonds: 50,000 acres in the north and over 200,000 in the south," the cooperative says.

### Drought water bank

California recognizes the seriousness of the situation and has implemented the 2009 Drought Water Bank. The Department of Water Resources will purchase water from willing sellers, primarily water agencies upstream of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Rice growers are expected to provide water for the bank, but prices could be \$150 per acre foot higher than with

### Key Points

- Almond crops in Sacramento, San Joaquin valleys are at risk.
- Water crisis puts more than 250,000 acres in jeopardy.
- California almond crop is valued annually at more than \$1 billion.

the last drought water bank.

Almonds are the sixth largest U.S. food export, and the California crop is valued annually at more than \$1 billion, illustrating the potential risk the almond industry faces in the shadow of a water crisis.

"In fact, almonds continue to be the second most frequently used nut worldwide for new nut product introductions, and if demand continues to grow at this rate, almonds will become the No. 1 nut for global new product introductions in 2008," says Richard Waycott, Almond Board of California president and chief executive officer.

### Valuable crop

The Almond Board of California reported 2007 crop year-end statistics that revealed the domestic, export and total worldwide shipments soared to all-time records, indicating continued strong global demand.

Those record shipments followed the almond industry's largest crop ever; during 2007, 1.38 billion pounds, 24% more than the previous year, were harvested.

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**IN DEMAND:** Almond exports continue to rise, making the consequences of the water situation even more serious.

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