

Almond harvest will be kicking up dust — but it shouldn't affect air quality

By Lori Gilbert

Stockton Record, Thurs., Aug. 23, 2018

A sign on Van Allen Road in southern San Joaquin County warned of low visibility due to dust on Wednesday morning.

Welcome to the 2018 almond harvest, which began two weeks ago in Bakersfield and is working its way up California's Central Valley.

Dust, on top of smoke from the Carr, Mendocino Complex and Ferguson wildfires that Valley residents have endured for a month, will be present in the air as San Joaquin County's third-largest agricultural commodity — behind grapes and milk — begins its fall harvest.

The good news is dust emanating from almond orchards won't create major health concerns as wildfire smoke has.

Most of the dust created by sweeping nuts into the middle of rows once they've been shaken to the ground and picking them up — all done mechanically — is concentrated in the orchards.

"Almond harvester emissions are limited to rural areas and have a negligible impact on the Valley's overall air quality, especially in regard to the Valley meeting the federal standards for PM2.5 (particulate matter 2.5 micros and smaller)," the Valley Air District said in a statement. "Most of the particulate from almond harvesting is localized PM 10 and dissipates quickly unlike PM 2.5 and ozone."

In a nutshell, so to speak, dust created by almond harvesting that is expected to go on for the next few weeks won't drastically alter air quality, although drivers may feel compelled to slow down on major thoroughfares, including French Camp Road and Highway 120, and homes and schools located near orchards may want to close doors and windows when machinery is at work.

The California Almond Board encourages growers to invest in new harvesting equipment and follow practices that keep dust to a minimum. Videos on the board's website offer tips on dust reduction for each phase of the harvest.

Some dust in the air is the price to pay for an industry that the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates will harvest 2.45 billion meat pounds statewide.

"In 2009, we were at 1.4 billion pounds," recalled Brent Holtz of the University of California Cooperative Extension. "Before it was a big deal when we hit a billion. It took 100 years to get to a billion and in less than 10 years we've added another billion pounds."

Likewise, Holtz remembered when San Joaquin County had 40,000 acres of almonds. In 2017 it had 74,200 bearing acres of almonds worth \$362.7 million according to the San Joaquin County Agriculture Commission.

"The official Almond Board estimate, the best we have until we finish harvesting, is 2.45 billion pounds," said Ripon grower Dave Phippen, who is a partner in Travaille and Phippen in Manteca, which he said shells about 24 million pounds and processes about 33 million pounds of almonds. "It will be the biggest crop in history, not because we're getting more nuts on each tree, but because more acres have been planted for almonds.

"This has been happening my whole life. People say, 'stupid growers you don't need more,' but every year we pull a rabbit out of the hat and sell them all."

[Letter to the Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, August 23, 2018:](#)

Grassroots air quality sensors

I very much agree with the opinion of Sayed Sadredin, retired long time director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, that amateur PurpleAir monitors cannot be depended on as tools to influence public policy ("Grassroots air quality sensors spreading to local neighborhoods," Aug. 17). His choice of words is spot on as we enter the 2018 election season. The Kern County Board of Supervisors and the Bakersfield City Council will each appoint a member to serve on the air pollution control district board.

Considering how vital clean air is to all of us and our future prosperity, the last thing we need is another "tool" influencing public policy.

Tony Amarante, Bakersfield

WORTH NOTING: Air District to provide rebates for old vehicle replacement to qualifying individuals

Excerpt from Bakersfield Californian article, Thurs., Aug. 23, 2018

The San Joaquin Valley Air District is providing money for replacements of 1999 or older high-polluting vehicles.

The website www.valleyair.org/drivecleaninthesanjoaquin has more information on the program.

The rebates are limited to those who meet the income and vehicle requirements.

With the funds, participants in the program must purchase a new or hybrid electric vehicle.

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