

Crops: Humidity prevents damage

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turn into tomatoes, he said. New plants with small roots in compacted soil may have trouble reaching water, making them susceptible to disease, he said.

The heat is also causing tree fruit to ripen faster than workers can pick it.

Simonian Farming Co. in Fowler is losing an estimated 5% to 10% of its peaches, plums and nectarines to the heat, David Simonian said.

Nighttime lows of 65 to 70 degrees are ideal for tree fruit, but hot nights, including a recent 90-degree low, are the equivalent of a day's ripening time, he said.

With workers stopping at noon because of the heat, "You can only pick it so fast," he added.

Simonian said he doesn't know the financial effects of the heat wave yet: "If I figured it out, I'd get depressed."

Allied Grape Growers is also evaluating the damage done to wine grapes and Thompson seedless grapes, said CEO and President Nat DiBudo.

Officials don't know how many dollars the heat wave will cost farmers, but "we know for sure it's not good for the crop," he said.

The grapes get sunburned, which makes them unusable, he said.

The heat also stunts development of some varieties, DiBudo said.

"When it's that hot, they're not worried about producing a crop. They're worried about survival," he said.

Mites that attack grapevines also breed more in hot, dry weather. Mites can cause defoliation, increasing grapes' exposure to the sun.

Walnut growers are doing what they can to prevent losses, including spraying a white coating on the trees to make them less susceptible to sunburn, said Gene Manhire, a plant manager for the Sequoia Walnut Growers Association.

The high humidity levels have helped prevent damage so far, said Vicki Zeigler, public relations manager for Diamond Foods Inc.

Older orchards are particularly vulnerable to sunburn because they have less leaf coverage. If temperatures continue to stay high, sunburn could cause black hulls, shriveled kernels and increased mold levels, she said.

"At this point, I haven't seen much sunburn," Manhire said. "But if it continues, we could have a problem."

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Valley crops strive to survive

Heat threatens harvest of plants; industry to lose millions of dollars.

By Bethany Clough
The Fresno Bee

The stretch of 100-degree-plus temperatures is proving to be as hard on central San Joaquin Valley crops as it is on people as farmers evaluate the damage of hot days and warm nights on tomatoes, grapes, tree fruit and other crops.

The heat caused a 10% drop in tomatoes processed for paste and other uses, said Ross Stragusa, president and CEO of the California Tomato Growers Association in Stockton.

Stragusa estimated growers have lost several million dollars worth of tomatoes statewide. Fresno County is the top-producing county in

the state.

Tomato plants go into survival mode when temperatures reach above 100, meaning already ripe tomatoes get soft and the green ones don't ripen, he said.

Nighttime lows are also hard on the plants. "When it's in the 80s, the plant doesn't have a chance to recover at all," he said.

When the extra costs processors face are included — such as less efficient shipping due to smaller yields — the heat wave could cost the industry tens of millions of dollars, Stragusa said.

The temperatures could also affect tomatoes that will be harvested in September. Blossoms are falling off the plants, meaning fewer will

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A peach shows signs of split pit, a condition caused by fast growth and overripening due to high temperatures. This yields unusable fruit in a portion of the crop and leaves others to be used for drying only.

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