

## **Drought drains resources from local farmers**

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**By Ron Borges**

YREKA – Siskiyou County farmers will have real concerns as a dry winter has caused a shortage of water.

Governor Schwarzenegger recently proclaimed a statewide drought after two years of below- average rainfall, low snowmelt runoff and the largest court-ordered restrictions on water transfers in state history. However, local farmers may not have to worry about their water being transferred to help Southern California.

Larry Ball, a representative of the Bureau of Reclamation at the Keswick power plant, said, “We have no plans right now to take water out of Siskiyou County and we have no plans to build plants to move that water.”

Even with the water not being transferred, the dry winter has caused a shortage for farmers.

Lisa Faris, a representative for the Montague Water Conservation District (MWCD) explained that they are already foreseeing problems in the future.

“Lake Shastina is only 57 percent of what it usually is,” she said. According to Faris, the lower lake level is causing the district to shorten the time ranchers will receive water – they will have until the middle of August instead of the end of September, which is 75 percent of the quota per ranch. Most farmers usually go over their quota by 30 to 40 percent.

Chairman of the MWCD, Stan Sears, said the district is not selling enough water and this is causing a rise in price from \$14 to \$28 per acre foot. “We have four employees and we are running the pumps. That’s why we increased prices,” Sears said.

The shortened time will allow ranchers one or two cuttings for hay this year, severely decreasing the amount of hay available for livestock.

According to Tim Koopmann, Watershed Resource Manager of the San Francisco Public Utilities and also a farmer, alfalfa hay is being sold for \$200 a ton, which is a 20 percent increase from 2007. Adding in \$40 per ton to transport, compared to \$28 in 2007, farmers will be “feeling it in their pocket books this year,” he said.

Sears said a rancher could lose \$100,000, depending on the size of the ranch, because of less hay to sell or a need to buy more feed. “It’s an economic wreck and it won’t be profitable,” said Koopman.

With the limited amount of hay, livestock will be feeding more on the pastures, having a direct impact on the fall grass season.

Koopmann says the ground will lose its protective cover due to over-grazing in fields. New grass spouts will have a lesser chance of surviving the cold and the weather this winter without cover, leading to a slow feed season next year.

Koopmann said that erosion of properties is a key concern for next season. Seeds will easily be washed away during the rain, costing farmers the price of reseeding.

Koopman suggested that farmers should start selling and shipping their cattle out to decrease their usual numbers. The lower numbers will lessen the hit farmers will take. Brad Peek, general manager for the Shasta Livestock Auction in Cottonwood, said he is seeing an increase in replacement cows to be sold and butchered

With the same conditions in 2007, farmers found a decline in weight gain among livestock. Low weight gain means less money when they are auctioned off – farmers typically receive about \$70 per head, according to Sears.

Siskiyou County farmers ship their livestock to winter farms the Shasta Valley or to midwestern states. The cost for shipping a loaded truck is \$4 to \$4.50 per mile. Rex Houghton, a board member for the MWCD and local farmer, is already feeling the affects of the water shortage.

“It’s going to affect us all in different ways, but we are going to be feeling something,” Houghton said on Wednesday.