

## New Year's cold snap headed to Fresno but won't affect Valley citrus growers

By Andrea Castillo

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Steve Matlak, right, of Fresno takes a photo of his daughters Tori, from left, 6, Ellie, 9, and their friend Rebekah Rooney, 8, of Fresno while bundled up for cool weather at the Downtown Fresno Ice Rink Sunday, Dec. 28, 2014. Cool, clear skies have brought cooler weather with lows dipping close to freezing.

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A cold snap is headed to Fresno and expected to bring freezing temperatures by Wednesday.

Citrus growers say the short storm won't affect their crops. In fact, the cold-but-not-too-cold weather is expected to firm up fruit and add vibrancy to its color.

The storm, which is coming down from British Columbia, is expected to bring a very cold Arctic air mass starting Tuesday, said meteorologist Modesto Vasquez of the National Weather Service in Hanford. Lows could hit the mid-twenties, with some rural areas getting the colder temperatures. But it's a fast-moving storm, Vasquez said, and the Valley will warm up by Friday.

Fresno could see daytime highs in the mid to upper 40s from Tuesday through New Year's Day, with lows dipping



down to the upper 20s on Wednesday and the low to mid 30s most other nights. The coldest temperatures are expected to be felt Tuesday morning in Madera, with 25 degrees, and Merced, with 26 degrees.

Fresno's high hit 55 Sunday and should reach that mark again Monday, the weather service said. Sunday's low hit 32, but was expected to be in the mid 30s overnight Sunday and Monday.

Vasquez said the storm could bring up to an inch of snow in the Sierra Nevada, with the snow level dropping to around 2,000 feet and potentially dropping some light snow in the foothills. The Valley is expected to stay dry.

Even as Fresnans bundle up, at least one community is rejoicing at the thought of freezing weather: Citrus growers. When it comes to growing the fruit, there is a fine line between helpful and harmful temperatures.

Joel Nelsen, president of [California Citrus Mutual](#), said temperatures between 30 and 32 degrees toughen fruit and ensure it won't ripen too quickly. The first week of December got really cold last year, he said, causing a \$50 million loss of fruit, mostly in Kern County and a little in Madera County. This year, the biggest issue has been a lack of cold nights, he said.

But Nelsen doesn't want it to stay cold. He said temperatures under 28 degrees for more than four hours are concerning for naval oranges and under 32 degrees for mandarins. The weather after Christmas was just right, he said.

"By and large this past weekend is exactly what the trees and the fruit need to make sure we have an extended season," he said. "The forecast over New Years is a cause of concern, but at this stage we're not really panicking about it."

Marilyn Kinoshita, the Tulare County agricultural commissioner, said lemons and mandarins are most sensitive to frost. There are many more baby trees this year because of last year's frost, she said, and they are more susceptible to damage.

"I'm hoping for a better year, because it's expensive," she said. "The growers in the citrus industry as a whole, they don't want frozen citrus on the market. So for us to go in and the till guys to cut that fruit, it's time consuming and costly. We don't want to go through that again."

Vasquez said the New Year's storm could be concerning for drivers traveling south toward Los Angeles. Several inches of snow could dump on Interstate 5 through the Grapevine, he said. Travelers should keep an eye out for possible road closures Tuesday night and Wednesday morning.

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