

Study: California farmers to fallow 560,000 acres of crops this year

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California farmers will fallow hundreds of thousands of acres and employ fewer workers in 2015, but the drought will not cripple the state's agricultural industry, UC Davis researchers said Tuesday.

California's farm economy overall has been surprisingly resilient during the drought. Farm employment increased by more than 1 percent last year. Gross farm revenue from crop production rose by two-tenths of 1 percent last year, to \$33.09 billion, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

A UC Davis report released Tuesday forecasts how agriculture will fare in 2015. Among the findings:

- California farms will lose a third of their surface water supply in 2015, but will be able to make up most of the loss by pumping more groundwater.
- Farms will employ about 19,000 fewer workers than would be the case this year without a drought.
- Farmers will fallow 560,000 acres, or about 7 percent of the state's irrigated farmland.

The losses will be uneven, said Richard Howitt, an agricultural economist at UC Davis and a co-author of the report. Regions with a reliable supply of groundwater will do best. He cited Tulare, Kings and Kern counties as areas with poor groundwater supplies that could struggle this year.

Much of the land fallowed this year would have been devoted to alfalfa, rice, cotton, wheat and barley, Howitt said.

At the same time, "we are not going to see more than 1 or 2 percent changes in food prices," Howitt said. "In terms of agricultural revenues – if you can get the water, a drought is a great time to grow crops."

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