

## **It was a good news, bad news season for MID**

Growers received plenty of free water which created district's budget shortfall

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Last spring's abundant rainfall was both a boon and a bust for the Merced Irrigation District.

It was a boon because with all the rain, there was a lot of snow in the mountains, which means more water in the reservoirs during the summer and more irrigation water available to growers.

But because there was so much rain in the spring, growers didn't buy water from the district, which left the MID with a shortfall.

Ted Selb, deputy general manager of the MID, said that the organization had budgeted to sell 315,000 acre-feet of water to growers in eastern Merced County.

Instead, the district only sold 275,000 acre-feet.

"That's \$600,000 revenue shortfall," Selb said.

And on top of that loss, the district is also losing money on the water it usually sells to the Bureau of Reclamation for water released to fisheries this time of the year.

But because the district was forced to release water for flood control, the bureau only paid \$15 an acre-foot instead of the normal \$75, leaving the district short another \$650,000.

Despite the slowdown in water sales, the district was able to provide water through today, which is the latest it can sell water to growers, Selb said.

"We had a good water year this year," he said. The runoff into the Merced River and Lake McClure was 1,652,000 acre-feet, which is 169 percent of average.

Selb said that the district will turn off the water today, but there will still be some water available to growers who need it as long as there is water in the canals.

A lot of this year's above average rainfall came in March, April and May, Selb said, with May seeing 173 percent of average rainfall.

That late water played havoc with almond growers, according to David Robinson, Merced County's agriculture commissioner.

The cold, rainy weather came at the time when almond trees were being pollinated, and the rain kept bees in their hives and not in the trees, which led to a short crop this summer.

"The hope is that the price will remain high, and possibly go even higher to make up," Robinson said.

Cotton growers also suffered from the late rains, he said, with growers unable to get into their fields to plant. That means some cotton won't be harvested until later than usual.

But the extra rainfall makes next year look bright for growers, according to Selb. The storage in Lake McClure is still at capacity, and that means abundant water next year.

"Even if we get a drought, the growers in the district will get 100 percent of their supply next year," Selb said.

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