



The Outlook

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Transition Crop Outlook

As the transition from Desert growing regions to Central California wraps up this week, supplies for the most part look to remain on the light side. The transition through the San Joaquin Valley of Central California will be a brief one this year. Planted acreage is down considerably this season due to water restrictions in the valley. Many growers have bypassed the area completely (going directly to the Salinas Valley) with others having minimal acreage of mostly Iceberg lettuce. The bulk of which will likely go to processor input.

As crops throughout the various growing regions continue the transition to spring production a generally cooler, moist weather pattern looks to continue. In Central California cooler temperatures have been the norm as numerous winter type storm systems rolled through California the past few weeks with a few more lined up to impact California into next week. Although precipitation is much needed in California the associated moisture and cooler temperatures have impacted growth rates throughout the region.

The transition between the desert growing regions and California's coastal valleys will typically involve product shortages and this year is no exception. The major factor in the supply situation this season is the lack of transitional acreage available. Growers planted less acreage due to water rationing with some skipping the deal altogether. Current stands are showing an inconsistent growth rates within many fields with lighter yields (down 20-30%) expected through April at a minimum. Many stands remain a bit behind schedule and light supplies look to remain the norm for the near term.

With less acreage planted growers typically will sow/seed a cover crop to rebuild the soil and contain erosion over the winter months. These grasses and legumes provide a perfect nursery for insect populations. As a result we are seeing a dramatic increase in gnat, aphid and flies in the current pack-outs. These very small flies tend to hide in between the leaves of lettuce and especially leaf items. Harvest crews are attempting to limit these problems by trimming up and shaking out product prior to packing. However there remains a significant amount of these flies in current packs.