Crop Outlook 3-21-23

California is once again receiving significant precipitation across the state from another ‘Atmospheric River” event into Wednesday. The tremendous winter this season, while great for the snowpack and drought, has caused havoc for growers throughout the state especially in the Salinas Valley. The heavy rains began to impact field preparations and planting schedules in January. The Salinas River exceeded flood stage in numerous areas after the first “Atmospheric River” event in January as plantings were underway. As rains continued in February the saturated ground prevented field crews from typical ground preparations and timely plantings as it was too wet to get personnel and machinery in the fields. Many stands remain saturated and will have to weeded and reshaped once they dry out before plantings can resume. Another factor includes the cold temperatures Salinas experienced this winter. California is in an unusually cold and wet winter pattern that was already hindering growth and delaying production before the devastating flood events of January and March. Most regions haven’t seen a winter this cold in a decade or more.

Another “Atmospheric River” event arrived in early March causing more flooding along the Salinas River. This storm also caused a major levee breach on the Pajaro River to the north of Salinas, with major flooding, road closures and evacuations of the town of Pajaro. Thousands of acres have been impacted by these rains and it will be weeks before damage assessments from the weather events will be completed. This may significantly impact supplies during the upcoming transition to Central California in mid-April. Strawberry stands in Pajaro look to have taken the brunt of the flooding in this region as field assessments get underway.

Long range forecasts look to bring a series of storm systems into California into early April. This will continue to hamper field work and plantings in the region. Growers are trying to get as much planted as possible in between the storms in the available acreage with many using transplants to help jump start the season. At this point Mother nature is in charge with upcoming weather patterns critical as growers continue to assess current damage.

Growers in the Desert growing areas have not been affected by these torrential rains with many planting late season acreage in the region in anticipation of lighter supplies from the coastal regions of California. These late season plantings will have their own set of challenges as the weather has already begun to warm up considerably. Reports are already showing small seeders, some fringe burn, and an uptick in insect activity in current acreage. Insect activity will likely only increase as the weather continues to warm and we move into later acreage. Aphids, worms and especially gnats (very small flies) will be on the rise along with the temperatures.

We will keep you up to date as we gather more information as quality and supplies.