

Rains have slight effect on Western produce output

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Recent heavy rains in California and Arizona have only slightly reduced the availability of vegetables and fruits, a U.S. Department of Agriculture marketing official said.

"But the quality and condition of some crops, including strawberries and lettuce, and possible almond supplies, has been affected," said Charles Brader, fruit and vegetable division director with USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service.

Brader said the heaviest of the past week's rains fell in the Los Angeles area and eastward through central Arizona. The rains were somewhat lighter in central California, where many of the nation's fruits, vegetables and specialty crops like nuts are grown.

"Availability of lettuce and other winter vegetables from the lower Imperial Valley and southwestern Arizona have not been reduced much," said Brader. "The main problem, according to our market

reporters, is condition of the produce on arrival at receiving points."

With exception of slightly higher prices for celery grown in the Los Angeles area and green onions in Arizona, shipping point prices for winter vegetables have continued at a relatively low level, he said. Iceberg lettuce, for example, was selling for about \$3 per carton of 24 heads February 25, according to USDA market reports.

Because berries tend to absorb water, some strawberries near maturity have been lost, Brader said.

Damage to California's almond crop, the source of virtually the entire U.S. supply as well as heavy exports, could be significant.

"Rains came at the critical blossoming and pollination time for early varieties of almonds," Brader said. Bees don't fly in the rain, and without them a crop won't get pollinated and develop fruit."

Just how badly the crop is hurt can be assessed more precisely about the begin-

ning of April, Brader said, noting that there were spotty reports of hail and a tornado that stripped blossoms from some almond trees in the Fresno area.

Little damage, if any, has been reported so far in "stone fruits," although early varieties are just reaching the blossoming stage. These include peaches, plums, apricots, and nectarines normally

harvested about June or through mid-summer.

The main problem with citrus, he said, has been a delay in the harvest because of the rains and mud.



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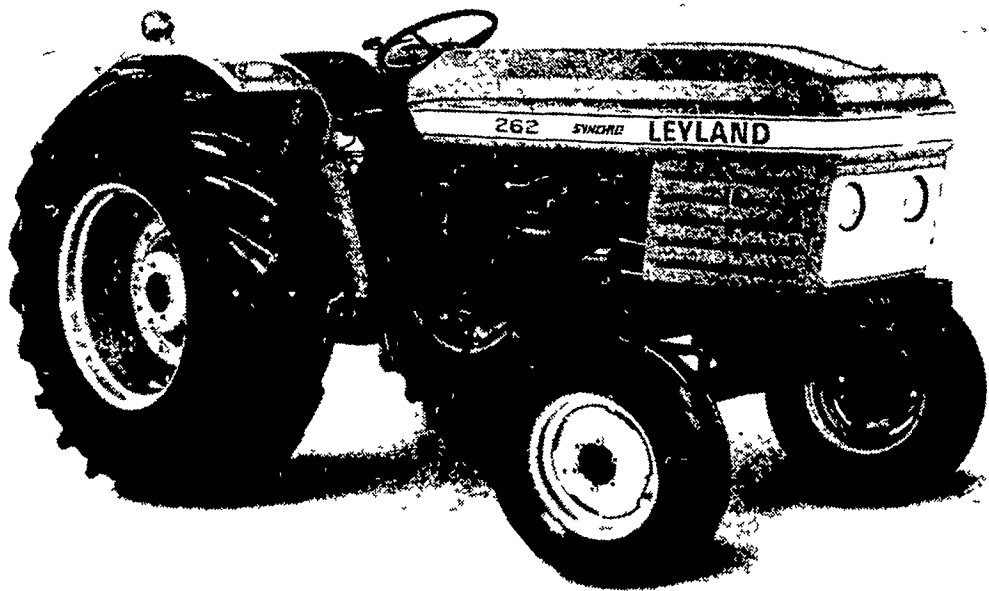
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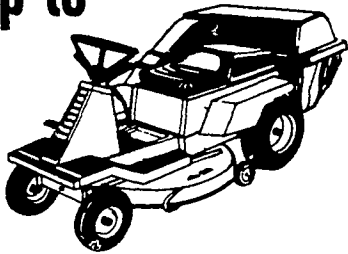
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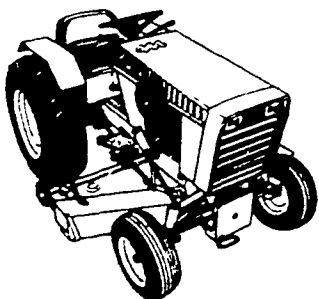
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