



California Rice Commission 2015 Rice Harvest Statement

Drought impacts in the Sacramento Valley are widespread and significant. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates this year's rice crop will encompass 411,000 acres, the lowest level since the early 1990s.

Recently, UC Davis estimated that the state will lose more than \$2 billion in economic activity as a result of the drought. Much of this impact will be in the small towns and back roads of the state where agriculture accounts for a high percentage of the jobs and business activity.

The valley rice harvest is underway and will likely continue into November. Of significant concern moving forward is the amount of water available for fall decomposition of rice straw following harvest. Not only is this water critical for rice production, it is the lifeblood of the Pacific Flyway.

Wildlife depends on Sacramento Valley rice fields year-round. The heaviest utilization of rice fields occurs during the fall and winter migration. For example, area rice fields provide nearly 60 percent of the winter diet for the millions of ducks and geese that migrate through our region.

Our farmers are doing their part to conserve water. The reduced acreage represent more than a 30 percent reduction in rice acres farmed during a normal year. Those rice fields in production are also very efficient, using about the same amount to grow a serving of rice as oranges or broccoli. Water from our shallow flooded fields goes back into the river at the end of summer – a time when more water in the rivers is especially beneficial for salmon.

We continue to battle this drought with tools developed by our fathers and grandfathers. While cuts in crop plantings and brown lawns can make an immediate difference, we need better long-term solutions. Work to advance the Sites Reservoir continues and offers the best promise for our region and the state for more real water, including maintaining water in rice fields for wildlife habitat and straw decomposition. This year alone, Sites Reservoir would have provided an additional 400,000 acre-feet of water. Ultimately it will store more water than Folsom Lake.